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New York

President:	Mr. Van Oosterom	(Netherlands)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Ms. Macdonal Álvarez
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Akhinzhanov
	Kuwait	Mr. Almunayekh
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Ms. Söder
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Ms. Tachco

Agenda

Briefing by the Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Briefing by the Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Angelino Alfano, Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Recalling the Security Council's latest note 507 on its working methods (S/2017/507), I wish to encourage all participants, members and non-members of the Council alike, to deliver their statements in five minutes or less. Note 507 also encourages briefers to be succinct and to focus on key issues. Briefers are encouraged to limit initial remarks to 15 minutes or less.

I now give the floor to Mr. Alfano.

Mr. Alfano: I am honoured to address the Security Council concerning the priorities of the Italian chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). I especially want to thank the Dutch presidency for this opportunity. This briefing is yet another example of the great spirit of cooperation between Italy and the Netherlands during our split term in the Security Council. Today, I am here because I strongly believe that the OSCE is crucial for our regional security, among many other reasons.

First, the OSCE is among the most inclusive regional and multilateral platforms in the world. Its geographical diversity stretches from Vancouver to Vladivostok. Secondly, all OSCE States have equal participatory rights. One voice is as important as another. Thirdly, the absence of a rigid legal structure enables the OSCE to respond quickly and flexibly to breaking political events. Fourthly, consensus is a strength in the OSCE. The search for a common denominator has reinforced the sense of an OSCE community and facilitates the implementation of our actions.

Given all the security risks that we face in Europe, a forum like the OSCE dedicated to security and cooperation is of great value to us, because, even when dialogue is not conclusive and does result in a solution, it nevertheless continues to build trust among parties. Trust is fundamental to defusing or resolving crises; over time, trust brings results. In the OSCE, trust is an important element, because discussions are inspired by the principles of equality and neutrality. We are constantly reminded that security is a global public good. No nation has ever been secure in isolation for as long as we can trace back in history. We all share responsibility for one another's security. For this reason, I firmly believe in the principle of comprehensive security that guides the OSCE; its ability to work in partnership with other security structures, such as NATO, the United Nations and the European Union; and its members' determination in working towards a confidence- and security-building agenda.

The motto of our OSCE chairmanship is "dialogue, ownership, responsibility". We strongly believe that these are the key ingredients for further strengthening multilateralism in an organization that reaches out to more than 1 billion people. Multilateralism is a defining factor of Italy's foreign policy. Our support for the OSCE is inspired by effective multilateralism, and the OSCE has proved this effectiveness in many ways. A good example of this is the structured dialogue on the current and future challenges and risks to security in the OSCE area, an informal format in which we can have a frank, inclusive and substantive dialogue on complex security issues.

Our motto — "dialogue, ownership, responsibility" — has a specific meaning. We want to follow an approach that looks equally at the Euro-Mediterranean, the Euro-Atlantic and the Euro-Asian regions and their connections; that is open, transparent and inclusive; and that is firm on principles, but flexible and creative on ways to defend those principles more effectively.

These are extremely complex times. The crisis in and around Ukraine is testing the core values that we share. We have faced a crisis of mutual trust and confidence, and there is only one way to rebuild trust: more dialogue, more political will, more concrete actions on the ground.

That is why my first mission as Chairman-in-Office was to Kyiv, Moscow and Donbas. I wanted to send a

strong and clear message: that we expect new steps to be taken for the implementation of the Minsk Agreements. The positive results include, first, the success of the Special Monitoring Mission of the OSCE, which is a crucial instrument for averting a dangerous escalation of the crisis despite the difficult conditions. Allow me to underscore once again the fact that we place the highest priority on the safety of the monitors, who must be able to carry out their work with the least possible risk.

Secondly, there is the acknowledgement by both Ukraine and Russia of the need for a United Nations support mission. We obviously are following the contacts under way to this end. Coordination with the OSCE is essential given its extensive experience on the ground. It is also important for the United Nations and the OSCE to complement each other in their different missions.

Beyond the Ukrainian crisis, we are also focusing our full attention on the so-called protracted conflicts. With regard to Georgia, we support the Geneva international discussions and are ready to promote dialogue through informal initiatives as well.

Concerning Nagorno Karabakh, we continue to support the work of the Minsk Group co-Chairs for a definitive and shared solution to the conflict. In Transnistria, we would like to build on the positive momentum. My Special Representative for the Settlement Process is in contact with all the relevant actors.

In the past, our security divide was mainly between East and West. Today, security concerns between East and West are still significant, and the OSCE's role is very relevant. However, we also need to look towards the South and the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean is a small sea, almost the size of a large lake when seen on a globe, but much of our global security is at stake there. It is therefore crucial to intensify dialogue and cooperation with the OSCE partner countries of the southern shores of the Mediterranean.

Last year, in the framework of the OSCE, we organized the Palermo Mediterranean Conference. As the Council is aware, the spirit of Helsinki, more than 40 years ago, inspired the rapprochement between East and West during the Cold War period. Today the spirit of Palermo nourishes and strengthens the dialogue for peace and security in the Mediterranean. The spirit of Palermo means the capacity to build a genuine partnership among the 57 OSCE countries and the Mediterranean partners, rediscovering the core mission of the organization as a plural and inclusive multilateral platform. This is the same approach that inspired our mandate in the Council last year.

We are dedicating particular attention to transnational threats such as terrorism; radicalization; the illicit trafficking of arms, drugs, cultural goods and hazardous waste; the links between terrorism and organized crime, international money-laundering and the sources of funding of terrorist groups. Fighting corruption is also central to our agenda, because corruption deeply affects the rule of law and undermines the relationship, built on trust, between Governments and their citizens.

Cybersecurity is another strategic priority. We are promoting initiatives to increase the awareness of decision-makers and the private sector as to how the Internet can affect peace and security. Last September, here at the United Nations, Italy, France and the United Kingdom launched a new initiative putting together States and Internet service providers to respond to the misuse of the Internet. We need to do much more to put terrorism offline.

During our OSCE chairmanship, we also intend to keep a strong emphasis on growth, innovation, human capital, good governance and the transition to green energy, contributing to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, an agenda that was defined by the United Nations globally and that is being implemented regionally, also through the work of the OSCE. In fact, the OSCE has always fostered the view of comprehensive security as encompassing both sustainable development and human rights.

I also want to underscore the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment. Not just because today is International Women's Day, but also because these issues have always been key priorities for Italy. As a member of the Council, we worked to mainstream gender-related issues throughout the United Nations system, especially in United Nations peace operations. Again, here at the United Nations, we have emphasized the fundamental role of women in conflict prevention and resolution by establishing a Mediterranean Women Mediators Network. We in the OSCE are dedicating great attention to the implementation of the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality.

Regarding the human dimension, this year is a special one because it marks the seventieth

anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Defending and promoting human rights is an important precondition for long-lasting peace, security and sustainable development. If fundamental rights are protected through the legal system and in everyday life, the rule of law is affirmed and security is guaranteed. If there is no such protection, conflicts multiply and social and political instability easily arise.

In that regard, one of the priorities of our mandate in the Council was the fight against human trafficking. During our presidency in November, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2388 (2017) in order to defend the rights and the dignity of refugees and migrants. Similarly, as Chairperson of the OSCE, we are raising the attention of the Organization to this heinous and intolerable crime, with a specific focus on women, children and minors.

At the same time, we remain committed to defining frameworks for safe and regular migration, based on shared responsibility and international solidarity. It is crucial to engage countries of origin, transit and destination at the same table. That is also why we favour the approach, led by the United Nations, in the negotiations for the global compact for migration and refugees.

The fight against all forms of intolerance and discrimination is another main priority for Italy. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the first major event of our OSCE chairpersonship was the Rome International Conference on Anti-Semitism, bringing together Jewish, Muslim and Christian political and religious leaders on that critical issue. Throughout this year, we want to devote greater attention to countering all forms of intolerance and discrimination. We cannot shy away from combating intolerance, because history has already taught us too many tragic lessons in that regard.

We will only achieve security when we recognize that we are all part of the same human race and that defending human dignity is the key to our liberty. In fact, that is a rooted value both in the United Nations and in the OSCE and it is what best defines the long-standing partnership between our two organizations in order to prevent conflicts and to promote stability and cooperation.

The President: I thank Mr. Alfano for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Ms. Söder (Sweden): Let me begin by welcoming the Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Minister Alfano, to the Security Council. The OSCE, as the largest regional security organization under Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, has an indispensable role to play in upholding the rules-based order in the European region to promote cooperation and security. I thank the Minister for his comprehensive briefing and I would like to assure him of our full support.

The Secretary-General has clearly outlined the importance of regional organizations in the maintenance of international peace and security, and his ambition to further enhance cooperation and coordination with those organizations. In that regard, there is clear potential for greater United Nations-OSCE collaboration, particularly in the search for solutions to conflicts in Europe, which the Secretary-General has identified as a key priority. The OSCE's three dimensions of security are an operationalization of the broad concept of security, which the United Nations has also made its own, with sustaining peace at its heart. Through closer collaboration on issues of mutual concern, the United Nations and the OSCE can increase the strength and effectiveness of the work of both organizations.

The OSCE represents one of the most advanced levels of security cooperation in any region in the world. Its strength lies in a set of fundamental principles, to which we, as members, have all committed. However, today there are challenges to what we have agreed. For that reason, it is essential that the OSCE focus on its core business. A frank and open dialogue among participating States, aimed at restoring respect for our commonly agreed principles and commitments — as enshrined, most notably, in the Helsinki Final Act and the Paris Charter — is needed. It is essential that the comprehensive concept of security and the OSCE's role be upheld. In particular, it is vital that the OSCE's human dimension and autonomous institutions are safeguarded.

Trust lies at the heart of conflict prevention and conflict resolution. Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine, its illegal annexation of Crimea and military actions in eastern Ukraine seriously challenge the rules-based European security order and erode that

trust. Rebuilding trust and confidence can happen through a renewed respect for the common principles and commitments to which we have all agreed. We therefore welcome the Italian chairpersonship's emphasis on substantive dialogue on issues that are at the core of the OSCE mandate.

Sweden will always be clear, consistent and principled when it comes to violations of the Charter of the United Nations, as well as on the European rules-based security order. We strongly support the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, which must be given full, safe and unhindered access throughout Ukraine. A possible United Nations peace mission in eastern Ukraine must have as its objective the restoration of Ukraine's sovereignty and its internationally recognized borders. The Minsk process needs to be pursued and there must be delivery on its commitments.

The protracted conflicts in Georgia, Moldova and Nagorno Karabakh are of great concern to the common OSCE acquis. Through the OSCE and the European Union, we continue to support peacebuilding measures and conflict resolution in Georgia, including through co-chairpersonship of the Geneva international discussions and the European Union Monitoring Mission on the ground. In those contexts, it is of particular importance that the United Nations and the OSCE reinforce their cooperation and dialogue and coordinate activities to jointly pursue conflict prevention and peacebuilding. We see a good example of informal cooperation on the ground in Ukraine, where the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission and the United Nations human rights monitoring mission are both operating.

Women's participation in all aspects of peacebuilding and sustaining peace must be ensured. We welcome the Italian chairpersonship's intention to mainstream a gender perspective into all of its activities. Gender aspects, including the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), must be an integral part of all our security-related work, both in Vienna and in the field missions.

In conclusion, the Council, by working together with the OSCE, can more effectively promote human rights, the rule of law and democracy, and ensure peace and security in Europe. That collaboration could be a model for United Nations cooperation with other regions that are in need of regional collaborative and security arrangements. In doing so, the Council can make full use of Chapter VIII of the Charter and encourage the settlement of disputes through regional arrangements.

Ms. Macdonal Álvarez (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for me to address you, Mr. President, and all members of the Security Council on behalf of the Plurinational State of Bolivia. We thank His Excellency Mr. Angelino Alfano, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Italian Republic, for his briefing on the situation in Europe in his capacity as Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Bolivia welcomes the programme of the Italian chairpersonship of the OSCE for 2018 and its intention to promote an inclusive rapprochement that respects cultural differences, as well as its desire to pay particular attention to the fight against all forms of racism, xenophobia, intolerance and discrimination, including those based on religious beliefs, and to strengthen the spirit of Helsinki and multilateralism.

To that end, we believe that it is important that any conflict within States be resolved first and foremost internally, with respect for the principle of sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity and with strict adherence to the Charter of the United Nations and international law. We understand that in order to do so, preventive diplomacy, dialogue, consultations, good offices, mediation and negotiations through subregional and regional organizations can also be considered. We believe that it is equally important to respect the principle of no threat or use of force in the resolution of conflicts. In that regard, we support Italy's proposal to encourage the exchange of best practices and ongoing dialogue among all parties in order to stabilize all conflict in European States.

We highlight the ongoing role of the OSCE in bolstering relations among its member States through dialogue, especially when, despite divergences, it has been able to promote important consensus in various situation that have needed it. We commend its work in the promotion of comprehensive security by addressing transnational threats while focusing on terrorism in order to prevent it and counter radicalization and violent extremism. We agree that in order to succeed, we must adopt a comprehensive approach that includes protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms and addressing the root causes of conflicts. We must also

prioritize education and promote the role of women and children.

In that regard, we welcome the fact that Italy has focused on mediation with regard to its economic potential and that it combats intolerance and discrimination and promotes pluralism and inclusion in their stead. We encourage the spirit of Palermo in facing these challenges, and we hope that its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and its Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, will be successfully implemented.

We hope that the channels of communication between the United Nations and the OSCE through its Liaison Office in Vienna will maintain and enhance their collaboration for the sake of international peace and security, and that they can achieve the goals they have set for themselves in the context of the priorities of that regional organization in a balanced and inclusive manner — in the interest of international peace and security.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): I welcome Mr. Angelino Alfano, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy, and congratulate his country on assuming the chairpersonship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) this year. Italy can count on our full support in addressing the priorities of its chairpersonship, which include conflicts in Europe, particularly Ukraine, challenges in the Mediterranean, transnational threats and, above all, respect for human rights — the keystone of peace and international security.

I would like to focus on two points: the central role of the OSCE in our efforts to put an end to the Ukrainian crisis and the other priority challenges on which we, member States of the Security Council and the United Nations, must support the OSCE.

The Ukrainian crisis is one of the gravest and most dangerous violations not only of the founding principles of the OSCE, established in Helsinki more than 40 years ago, but also of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. The OSCE has been able to respond appropriately to avoid the escalation of the conflict. It has acted responsibly by rapidly deploying a Special Monitoring Mission and by assuming thereafter a central role in supporting the implementation of the Minsk agreements, which remain the only possible path to a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

France is determined, in collaboration with Germany, to pursue its mediation efforts using the Normandy format. Each result obtained in this format and implemented on the ground counts. We saw evidence of that in December with the exchange of prisoners between the Ukrainian State and the separatists. Only progress in this format will support the implementation of the Minsk agreements by the parties. We count on the Council to fully support their efforts to that end as soon as possible.

We remain more convinced than ever that the OSCE, through its Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, has a vital role to play in ensuring the implementation of political decisions on the ground. In that connection, the Special Monitoring Mission must be able to fully exercise its mandate without hindrance. We once again call for its staff to be granted freedom of movement and condemn in the strongest terms any violation of that principle, whether in the form of intimidation, threats or denial of access to certain areas. The OSCE's participation in the holding of future local elections in Donbas will also be necessary, although the modalities have yet to be determined.

Finally, our general goal remains the restoration of Ukraine's control over all its territory within the internationally recognized borders. I recall, in that regard, that France strongly condemns and does not recognize the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol.

My second point relates generally to the role of the OSCE in the promotion of peace and security in Europe. Given the diversity of the threats we face, we encourage the OSCE's 57 members to abandon their political postures and to embrace instead the spirit of Helsinki, which made it possible, over 40 years ago, to reach a common vision of security in Europe.In that context, we believe that the work of the OSCE now needs to focus on the following issues.

The first is the resolution of regional conflicts. Moving past the Ukrainian case, we cannot be satisfied with the persistence of stagnant conflicts on the European continent, be it in Nagorno Karabakh, Transnistria or the separatist territories of Georgia. We are convinced that the role of the OSCE is central in all such cases, both in connection with and within

the framework of the established mediation formats, in order to promote dialogue and restore confidence which, as Minister Alfano and Deputy Minister Söder have stressed, are the key to resolving the conflicts.

Secondly, we must preserve the instruments of trust and military transparency on the European continent. The arms control treaties and confidence-building measures developed in the OSCE's political-military dimension are unique and constitute pillars of the European security architecture. It is essential to preserve their implementation and relevance, including by adapting them to modern realities. We are in favour of continuing discussions within the framework of the OSCE Structured Dialogue.

Thirdly, the preservation of the human dimension must remain central to the work of the OSCE, in line with the wishes of the Italian chairpersonship. This human dimension is central to the functioning and the identity of the OSCE. It is also key to finding long-term solutions to crises. To reject or marginalize that dimension can only undermine the prospects for peace and security in Europe. Like the Italian chairpersonship, we seek to promote the universality and indivisibility of all fundamental rights.

Finally, the OSCE must develop its operational role in response to certain emerging regional challenges. That applies, in particular, to combating human trafficking, preventing radicalization and addressing the impact of climate change on security. Doing so is important for each of these key challenges to security in Europe. The OSCE must develop concrete responses that are not merely public statements of position.

I will conclude by recalling the strong convergences that exist between the actions of the OSCE and those of the United Nations. Those two organizations share a common approach that combines security, development and human rights. It is our duty, in the Council, to continue to support the efforts of the OSCE in all crises in which it is called upon to act.

Mr. Almunayekh (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to begin by welcoming Mr. Angelino Alfano, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy. I also seize this opportunity to congratulate him on Italy's chairpersonship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for 2018. I wish him every success in his presidency. I would also like to thank him for his valuable and comprehensive briefing today.

The recurrent annual briefing of the OSCE is commendable. It reaffirms the commitment of the organization to promoting cooperation with the United Nations in order to maintain international peace and security. In that context, the State of Kuwait, as a non-permanent Security Council member, looks forward to strengthening cooperation between the Council and the League of Arab States. Such cooperation should be framed within an institutional context, similar to the cooperation that the Council enjoys with the African Union and the European Union. We also call for an annual briefing from the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, similar to that we have received today.

Experience has proven that, in the light of the heightened armed conflicts and the difficulties and obstacles it faces in certain situations, the United Nations needs the support of regional organizations, pursuant to Chapter VIII of the Charter. It is clear that regional and subregional organizations are the most qualified and cost-effective entities in helping to understand the realities of some conflicts. They are also the best equipped to analyse information related to the maintenance of peace and security in their regions.

The Arab States, particularly those on the Mediterranean, share the same concerns and challenges of the OSCE, including illegal migration, trafficking in persons, terrorism, transnational organized crime, counter-terrorism, extremism, racism and hatred of religions. Here, I emphasize that violent extremism and terrorism are threats to all values and cultures and not limited to any religion, race, culture and identity, as they also disregard human rights. We must all therefore strengthen our cooperation and redouble our efforts in order to overcome those challenges. In that context, I reaffirm that the State of Kuwait is keen to foster international cooperation in combating violent extremism and terrorism by adhering to all relevant Security Council resolutions, in addition to cooperating with United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, including the Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism.

As the geographically largest regional security organization, the OSCE adds significant value to our common pursuit of international peace and security. Its activities cover Europe, Asia and Euro-Asia and are complementary to those of the United Nations. The OSCE has greatly contributed to United Nations efforts, particularly during the three pre-conflict phases of

early warning, preventative diplomacy and mitigation efforts, while also working towards peaceful settlement and contributing in the efforts to rebuilding peace.

We cherish the hope that OSCE efforts will tangibly contribute to overcoming long-standing crises that need radical solutions, such as those in Nagorno Karabakh, Georgia and the Balkans, in addition to addressing the conflict in Ukraine, which is entering its fourth year. We hope that all relevant parties will fully implement resolution 2202 (2015) and the 2015 Minsk agreements so as to achieve a comprehensive and balanced solution to this issue through dialogue, in particular within the Normandy format. We commend the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission for its efforts in that regard, including the facilitation of dialogue among all parties to the conflict.

In conclusion, we wish Minister Alfano every success during his term as Chairmperson-in-Office of the OSCE in achieving Italy's foreign policy aims and priorities, which he outlined in his briefing, as they are in line with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations in the maintenance of security, stability and peace in the world.

Mr. Akhinzhanov (Kazakhstan): At the outset, I would like to thank His Excellency Minister Alfano, Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), for his briefing.

Kazakhstan welcomes the priorities of the OSCE Italian chairpersonship, under the motto, "Dialogue, Ownership, Responsibility". We commend its intention to focus efforts on strengthening the organization's effectiveness in responding to the conflict cycle and arms control by deepening the OSCE Structured Dialogue, which was previously initiated by the German and Austrian chairpersonships.

We encourage the OSCE to further develop its preventive toolbox in order to tackle existing conflicts and growing challenges, such as terrorism, radicalization, trafficking in human beings and the uncontrolled influx of migrants. In doing so, we are ready to stand side by side all participating States.

We support the OSCE key priority to seek a peaceful resolution to the conflict in and around Ukraine, on the basis of the Minsk agreements. We also reiterate our strong support for the activities of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, to the work of which Kazakhstan representatives contribute.

In the same vein, we welcome the three-day visit of the Adviser to the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office for the Transnistrian settlement process, Alfredo Conte, to Moldova on 20 February. His meetings on the ground are important steps in the ongoing confidence-building process. We also welcome the meeting of the co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group with the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia in February.

The position of Kazakhstan regarding conflict remains crystal clear and unchanged. My country adheres to a balanced and realistic approach to conflict resolution that is based on the fundamental principles of international law. As a member of the Security Council, we stand for the implementation of its relevant resolutions, while as an OSCE participating State we also reaffirm the importance of the regional platform provided by the OSCE. The outcome of the recent Munich Security Conference clearly shows the necessity for a more cooperative approach, focusing on the Structured Dialogue and a positive, unifying agenda.

In addressing transnational threats, we also encourage the promotion of cooperation among the OSCE and other regional organizations, such as the Eurasian Economic Union, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-building Measures in Asia, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization, which play an important role in strengthening regional and subregional cooperation and security in Eurasia. We welcome the plan of the Italian chairpersonship to actively involve its Mediterranean and Asian partners by fostering joint work.

I would like to thank the Italian chairpersonship for entrusting Kazakhstan with chairing the OSCE Economic and Environmental Committee. We believe that the secondary priorities of the Italian chairpersonship that aim to enhance dialogue on the issues of promoting economic progress and security through innovations, including in the spheres of the environment, human capital and good governance, open new avenues for mutually beneficial cooperation. I would like to highlight the fact that Italy's priorities correspond closely to those outlined by my President, Nursultan Nazarbayev, in his recent addresses to the nation in January and March. They focus on the issues of economic and social security of people and the development of human capital, among others.

We very much welcome the initiative of OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger to create a new generation of OSCE field missions, and we offer the grounds of Expo 2017 in Astana to serve as a platform for the establishment of an OSCE centre for green economy and connectivity. We count on the support of the Italian chairpersonship and participating States.

The OSCE remains one of the key United Nations partner organizations. As security challenges continue to evolve, we need to deepen United Nations-OSCE cooperation. As in the 2010 Kazakhstan chairpersonship of the OSCE, and later on, we support a comprehensive approach to security issues through inclusive dialogue, joint ownership and common responsibility, where no one and no concern is left behind.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea would like to welcome to the Security Council the Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy, Mr. Angelino Alfano. We also thank him for his comprehensive and substantive briefing on the programme and activities planned under the OSCE Italian chairpersonship this year.

The global context in which we must maintain peace and security and find lasting solutions to ongoing conflicts is both increasingly complex and diverse. The levels of complexity go beyond conflict between two States. Terrorist groups and armed groups, organized crime, commercial interests and other elements of globalization, such as the movement of people, hinder the ability of States, regional groups and the United Nations to find sustainable solutions and guarantee peace and security for all the men and women of the world. The Republic of Equatorial Guinea therefore commends the programme of the OSCE Italian chairpersonship and the motto it has chosen, "Dialogue, Ownership, Responsibility".

The need to strengthen multilateralism is critical to the Security Council and its allies, such as the OSCE, in fulfilling their commitments. We all have something to contribute and we all have a role to play. With 57 participating States and in its capacity as one of the largest regional security organizations, the OSCE was created to complement and assist, within the framework of its mandate, the mechanisms of the United Nations under Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations. We therefore believe that it is very important for the two organizations — the OSCE and the United Nations — to maintain close cooperation in order to strengthen the role of the OSCE in implementing United Nations decisions concerning European conflicts and for the benefit of international peace and security. We also encourage greater collaboration among the OSCE and African regional and subregional organizations, within the framework of expanding Euro-Mediterranean and Euro-Atlantic multilateral relations.

In that context, I take this opportunity to endorse the priority issues on the agenda of the OSCE Italian chairpersonship, which focus on achieving a peaceful solution to the conflict in Ukraine. We also stand by its priority to address protracted conflicts through existing formats. Protracted conflicts often generate social and economic instability, nurturing terrorist groups and their supporters, organized crime and a lack of social cohesion, which in turn nourishes radicalization, violent extremism, racism, xenophobia and intolerance. It is encouraging that the efforts of the OSCE are geared towards finding peaceful and sustainable solutions to the conflicts in its territory.

Moreover, the major efforts of the OSCE, its independent institutions and its missions on the ground have so far prevented the situations in the so-called protracted conflicts in Georgia, Nagorno Karabakh and Transnistria from intensifying. For that reason, we would be pleased if the OSCE Italian chairpersonship were to work with the same focus that has been maintained to date, in collaboration with the United Nations wherever possible, towards the long-awaited solutions to all of those equally important issues, which paralyse the continuity and daily life of the affected communities in the same way. We believe that a new approach and greater resolve are necessary to put an end to those crises, while respecting the principles of sovereignty and independence of States, in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

One of the strategic objectives of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea's membership of the Security Council, as a representative of the African continent, is to ensure the fair and humane treatment of immigrants and refugees. We would therefore highlight and endorse the Italian chairpersonship's objective of addressing the challenges and opportunities arising from the Mediterranean, such as migration. In so doing, we

welcome the chairpersonship's intention to address the migratory situation, not only in terms of security, but also with respect to economic potential and the fight against intolerance and discrimination. The Republic of Equatorial Guinea applauds Italy's determination to promote pluralism, inclusion and intercultural and interreligious dialogue as the bedrocks of international peace and security.

Today, on International Women's Day, we also highlight the focus of the OSCE chairpersonship on ensuring a gender perspective in its work and in implementing its gender action plan. If we may, we would also like to encourage the chairpersonship, in line with resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, and subsequent resolutions on this important issue, to incorporate into its gender actions plan the relevant recommendations of the Secretary-General's report of 14 August 2017 (A/72/323), on the programme of activities for the implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent, focusing on women and girls of African descent, and other similar reports that promote the inclusion and better treatment of women and girls of other European minority groups in peace and security processes.

In conclusion, I would like to highlight the excellent mediation efforts of the OSCE to achieve peaceful solutions to conflicts, in line with the implementation and full respect of agreements. We again emphasize the importance of closer cooperation between the United Nations and the OSCE, which is the only mechanism for peaceful solutions and greater stability in the OSCE regions. Allow me to wish every success to Italy's Chairperson-in-Office in fulfilling his priorities.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I welcome the convening of this meeting and the presence of Minister Angelino Alfano, to whom we wish every success during the Italian chairpersonship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). He delivered a valuable briefing on the priorities that he will spearhead this year at the helm of the OSCE, many of which are convergent with those of the United Nations and, consequently, the Security Council.

In line with Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, Peru believes it necessary to develop and strengthen synergies with regional organizations in order to more effectively prevent and respond to conflict situations. We take this opportunity to highlight three areas in which we believe that the OSCE plays a fundamental role in the maintenance of international peace and security.

The first area is the effectiveness of the OSCE's comprehensive security vision and corresponding regulations, which recognize the fulfilment of security and human rights as two sides of the same coin, with a view to acting collectively to prevent and address modern vulnerabilities, challenges and threats. Despite the emergence of revisionist discourse, we believe that the current vision is clearly valid and relevant. If we are to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, ethnic, religious and cultural diversity must be understood as a value, never as a threat. In that regard, we applaud the fact that the spirit of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime has spread across the Mediterranean to protect migrants, including women and children, the victims of various conflicts and humanitarian crises and those who fall victim to criminal organizations that traffic in persons. Comprehensive security is focused on individuals.

The second area is the OSCE's remit and leadership in the fight against terrorism and transnational organized crime. We wholeheartedly agree with the OSCE on the importance of identifying the nexus between terrorism and transnational organized crime to effectively combat those scourges. We must understand and address their perverse dynamics, which work to benefit them both and to harm our collective security and our societies and institutions. Peru believes that regional organizations should promote implementation of the various elements of our international regulatory framework, such as Security Council resolutions, while taking into account the particular challenges of each region.

The third area concerns the credibility and value of the mechanisms of political support and peaceful settlement of disputes that the OSCE offers to its members in Europe and Central Asia. We believe that the legacy of its work constitutes a reference for all regional mechanisms aimed at promoting peace and security.

Finally, we emphasize the consistency of the principles of dialogue, ownership and responsibility that are reflected in the OSCE's theme for this year, with a sustainable peace-centred approach that the United Nations has championed.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would first like to thank Foreign Minister Angelino Alfano for his comprehensive briefing. We could not agree more with the idea of relaunching the spirit of Helsinki, and he can count on our support this year. We fully support the priorities of this year's Italian chairship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), particularly finding a solution to the crises in and around Ukraine, addressing protracted conflicts, strengthening the dialogues on girls and on good governance, combating discrimination and intolerance and promoting freedom of religion or belief and interreligious dialogue.

In recent years the overall political and military situation in Europe has deteriorated significantly, owing to ongoing violations of the principles and commitments to which we all subscribe. We believe that better use could be made of the OSCE as a platform for dialogue, mediation and conflict prevention. Obviously, and unfortunately, the Russian aggression against Ukraine remains a key issue for the Organization. We appreciate the fact that Mr. Alfano's first visit in his capacity as OSCE Chairperson-in-Office was to Ukraine and Russia. A lack of genuine dialogue and trust is what has led us to this moment, and it continues to misdirect us. The illegal annexation and occupation of Crimea and the continued aggression in Donbas will have devastating consequences for the Euro-Atlantic security system. We cannot allow the use of force to become an accepted instrument in relations between sovereign States.

In the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, we should not ignore the role of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission, which still represents the eyes and ears of the international community on the ground. Poland is one of the biggest contributors to the Mission, with 40 monitors and analysts, and we will continue to support it. Not only should we work to reform and further enhance the Mission, we should ensure that it can fully execute its mandate. All attacks on the Mission and its monitors by Russian-backed militants must cease immediately. Russia's return to the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination will be crucial if stabilization efforts in Donbas are to succeed.

We would like to reiterate Poland's strong support for the work of the OSCE autonomous institutions, particularly the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, which is located in Warsaw. Its role in identifying challenges, especially within the contexts of security and of assistance to OSCE participating States in the implementation of their commitments in the area of human rights and democracy, cannot be overestimated. Poland is proud that by hosting the Office and its flagship event, the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Warsaw has become a European centre for dialogue on democracy and human rights.

We need to make better use of the existing instruments aimed at rebuilding trust and confidence, notably the Vienna Document, the Treaty on Open Skies and the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe. We are concerned about the fact that Russia continues either to violate their provisions or act contrary to their spirit. Any further erosion of them would be highly regrettable and could have tragic consequences. In that context, we would like to emphasize that modernizing the Vienna Document remains a crucial element of the discussion on risk reduction and confidence-building.

The OSCE's mediating role in the protracted conflicts in Nagorno Karabakh, Transnistria and Georgia are also worthy of mention. The diplomatic efforts that the Organization coordinates can influence decision-makers in creating the atmosphere of trust and stability that the local communities in those regions have awaited for so long.

As the looming threat of terrorist activities fuels the ongoing migration crisis, we must stand united in order to combat racism, xenophobia, intolerance and discrimination, and pay special attention to education in our efforts to halt the spread of radicalization and poorly understood nationalism. Education is the best prevention.

On International Women's Day, a liberating day, I want to pay tribute to all the ordinary women who have played extraordinary roles in the history of their countries and communities. We hope that the OSCE will strive to keep up the momentum in its current efforts to further implement programmes aimed at increasing women's participation in the political and public arenas, building the capacities of women's networks, combating violence against women and implementing resolution 1325 (2000), which emphasizes women's involvement in conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Côte d'Ivoire would like to thank Mr. Angelino Alfano, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International

Cooperation of Italy and Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), on behalf of his country, Italy, for his briefing on the programme of his chairship during his mandate. We welcome the convening of this meeting, which is part of the overall framework of cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations in the area of international peace and security, in accordance with Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations.

The work of the OSCE in Europe and that of the Economic Community of West African States, for example, in West Africa, shows clearly that regional organizations can be effective tools for supporting the United Nations in conflict prevention and resolution. We need hardly recall the OSCE's peacekeeping and international security efforts, which are a major part of preventive diplomacy in its area of remit. In that regard, my delegation commends the ongoing support that the organization provides to the mechanisms established to resolve the conflicts in Nagorno Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia and to advance the peace talks concerning Transnistria and Georgia. We also appreciate its role in helping to stabilize Kosovo and monitor the implementation of the Minsk agreements on eastern Ukraine.

Côte d'Ivoire calls for enhanced cooperation between the United Nations and the OSCE, which, with its 57 member States, continues to be one of the most significant collective-security entities in the world. We welcome the priorities outlined by the Chairperson-in-Office, which are geared towards dialogue, ownership and responsibility and based on a proactive approach to security, encompassing its political, military, economic, environmental and human aspects. We also welcome the focus on migration issues and the fight against corruption and new transnational threats, such as terrorism, cybercrime and trafficking in persons.

In conclusion, the delegation of Côte d'Ivoire wishes Italy every success in implementing its priorities in chairing the OSCE with the aim of achieving the organization's goals and objectives.

Ms. Tachco (United States of America): I thank Foreign Minister Alfano for his briefing on the activities of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and for his leadership of the organization. The United States greatly appreciates the OSCE's efforts in promoting security, stability and good governance in the region and throughout the world. We offer our full support to the organization and to Italy in its chairship.

The OSCE has been critical to developing a robust European and Eurasian security architecture. The United States greatly appreciates the contributions it has made over more than 40 years in helping to underpin stability, security and prosperity throughout the region. As an OSCE participating State, the United States supports its partners and reaffirms its own commitment to that crucial effort. In order to strengthen the OSCE's utility and preserve its function as a primary forum for an open dialogue on core European security concerns, we strongly support the continuation of its structured dialogue on current and future challenges and risks. That initiative has opened up productive and frank deliberations among participating States, fostering mutual understanding and cooperation in addressing the leading challenges of our day.

One of the greatest security and humanitarian challenges the OSCE is facing today is the continuing crisis in eastern Ukraine, where Russian acts of aggression have claimed more than 10,000 lives. Russia and the forces it arms, trains, leads and fights alongside have perpetuated the conflict for too long. The United States commends the OSCE's efforts to resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine. We recognize in particular the essential role of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, which remains the international community's best source of impartial information on the significant toll that the conflict in eastern Ukraine has taken on the country's people, land and infrastructure. The fact that Russia, a member of the OSCE, continues to drive the conflict is a terrible irony. The OSCE's role in facilitating humanitarian work has been critical to alleviating the suffering caused by four years of aggression. We applaud the courage and dedication of the Monitoring Mission's unarmed monitors and strongly support efforts to ensure their safety in carrying out their critical mission.

The United States continues to support the Minsk agreements and their full implementation as the best path to restoring Ukraine's territorial integrity and alleviating the suffering in the Donbas region. While both sides must implement their Minsk commitments, Russia can single-handedly bring peace and end the conflict by withdrawing its forces. We also call for an end to Russia's occupation of Crimea, which has contributed to needless violence, displacement and death for too long. Beyond Ukraine, the United States

welcomes and supports the OSCE's continuing efforts to resolve the conflicts in Nagorno Karabakh, Georgia and Transnistria. It must remain focused on those protracted conflicts in order to underscore the fact that frozen and status-quo conflicts are completely antithetical to the peace, stability and security priorities of the OSCE and the international community.

The OSCE's crucial role in strengthening security and stability, addressing the humanitarian needs of conflict-afflicted populations and promoting good governance in its region cannot be overstated. The United States fully supports the OSCE's comprehensive approach to addressing critical security challenges. We also unequivocally affirm its importance as a partner to the United Nations and in particular to the Security Council in protecting and promoting peace and prosperity.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): I would like to start by congratulating Mr. Angelino Alfano, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Italy, on his assumption of the post of Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). I would also like to thank him for his comprehensive briefing and for outlining the priorities of his chairship in addressing current threats and challenges to peace and security in the Euro-Atlantic, Euro-Mediterranean and Eurasian regions.

We welcome the significant contribution that the OSCE, as one of the world's largest regional security organizations, continues to make in support of the maintenance of international peace and security. Its comprehensive approach to security, which includes its political, military, economic, environmental and human dimensions, is in line with the new global paradigm aimed at ensuring sustainable peace and development. In that connection, we take note of the OSCE's efforts in conflict prevention and resolution as well as post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding. We particularly appreciate the important role that it is playing in the efforts to resolve the protracted conflicts, and newer ones, in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia, in cooperation with the United Nations and the European Union.

Dialogue and negotiation remain the only way to find durable political and diplomatic solutions to some of the difficult and extremely delicate peace and security challenges affecting member States of the OSCE. Where reaching a peaceful settlement is concerned, we cannot overemphasize the importance of political will and commitment on the part of the parties to some of these conflicts. Enhancing the necessary trust and dialogue between and among the parties is also very critical to making tangible progress. We are pleased to note that the Italian chairship has made that one of its important priorities.

As in other regions of the world, the growing threats of terrorism and violent extremism pose a significant security challenge to OSCE member States, and the role that the OSCE has been playing in preventing and combating terrorism, by promoting a coordinated approach among member States, is very important. In that context, it is only appropriate that the Italian chairship is placing a greater emphasis on sustaining durable peace in the OSCE area by promoting a holistic approach to countering terrorism. There can be no doubt that transnational security threats, including the illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons, money-laundering, drug trafficking and, most importantly, human trafficking, are among the most serious threats to the security and stability of Europe. It is therefore fitting that Italy has chosen the Mediterranean region, where most of those transnational organized crimes originate, as one of its geographic areas of focus during its chairship.

Promoting cooperation with other relevant regional and international organizations will be vital for the OSCE, not only in countering terrorism but also in other dimensions of its work. Ethiopia attaches great importance to the cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations, in line with Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations. In that regard, we appreciate the partnership between the OSCE and the United Nations, which has been maintained through high-level dialogues and information-sharing, as well as cooperation in the field.

Lastly, we wish the Italian chairship success in implementing its priorities in the work of achieving greater security and stability in the entire OSCE area.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I thank Foreign Minister Alfano for his briefing. The United Kingdom fully supports the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and its efforts to achieve stability, peace and democracy for the people of Europe, including through dialogue. Like the United Nations, the OSCE is a pillar of the international rules-

based system, and respect for its fundamental principles must be restored.

Nowhere in Europe is that more important than in Ukraine. I would like reaffirm the United Kingdom's full support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, including in Crimea. Those are words with which we open so many Security Council resolutions. They are fundamental to all States Members of the United Nations. Yet last month, we marked the fourth anniversary of Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea. That act, by a permanent member of the Council, showed complete disregard for the Charter of the United Nations and trampled on international law. In addition to annexing Crimea, Russia has destabilized eastern Ukraine and continues to fuel the conflict, at enormous human and material cost to the Ukrainian people.

As always, it is the civilians who suffer most. Since the conflict began, more than 10,300 people have lost their lives, almost 25,000 have been injured and 3.4 million are in need of humanitarian assistance, particularly along the line of contact. We have seen reports that more than 1,000 Russian military personnel and mercenaries have lost their lives, so the Russian people are also mourning their children. Only by means of a truly sustainable ceasefire and genuine political will, through the implementation of the Minsk agreements, can the conflict be brought to an end. We welcome the most recent recommitment to the ceasefire by the Trilateral Contact Group. However, past ceasefires have been broken and have not resulted in sustained improvements to the security situation.

While the conflict continues, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, ably directed by Chief Monitor Apakan, must be permitted to carry out its mandate in full and granted complete, safe and unhindered access to all Ukraine, including Crimea and the parts of the border with Russia that are not under Ukraine's control. The increasingly aggressive behaviour and threats that we seeing directed at the OSCE monitors are deeply worrying, and we have not forgotten the sacrifice of paramedic Joseph Stone on 23 April last year. If, as Russia claims, it truly cares about the people of the Donbas region, it should end the fighting that it started, withdraw its military personnel and weapons and cease its support for the separatists. Russia should also show a genuine political will to end the conflict and abide by the Minsk agreements that it signed. Until those steps are taken, we will work with our European Union partners to ensure that sanctions remain fully in place.

We must retain the Council's focus on Ukraine. Next Thursday, the United Kingdom will co-host an Arria Formula meeting to discuss this blatant violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. The chaos, violence and ongoing loss of life resulting from Russia's military operations clearly merit the Council's time. We must be ready to remain seized of the issue.

We welcome and support Italy's intention to prioritize tackling modern slavery and addressing the challenges associated with migration, including corruption and trafficking. In addition, we support Italy's focus on the implementation of the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality and on protracted conflicts, which continue to undermine security in the OSCE region. Those are areas where the OSCE's cross-dimensional approach can add real value. We are keen to work with Italy to ensure that OSCE activities complement, rather than duplicate, the work of United Nations agencies and other organizations.

The OSCE's autonomous institutions and network of field operations can and do make a significant contribution to the promotion of security, stability, democracy and the rule of law across the region. However, it is able to do so only when Member States stand up for the principles that guide it. It is the task of all of us on the Security Council to stand up for those who suffer acts of aggression from larger neighbours, for the Charter of the United Nations and for international law.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to Mr. Angelino Alfano, Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Italy, for his substantive briefing on the work of the OSCE and the issues on its agenda.

We have always proceeded from the assumption that the work of the OSCE is particularly important to the European continent, and we have always supported strengthening European institutions and agreements on treaty and legal regimes in our shared security area. Russia is firmly committed to the Helsinki principles for relations between States and to political obligations undertaken in that regard. Unfortunately, our calls for reasonable dialogue and practical implementation of the principles of equal and indivisible security in the West have so far gone unheeded. Some of our partners

continue to prefer to see things in terms of the Cold War, portraying Russia as a threat to peace and security and forming closed clubs in which some countries' security can come only at others' expense. The result of all that has been that today the Euro-Atlantic architecture, of which the Charter of the United Nations and the Helsinki Final Act remain the cornerstones, is being severely tested.

In these complex realities, it is more important than ever to strengthen multilateral cooperation, including through international organizations. That cooperation should be regular and multifaceted, and should cover every aspect of security. It is the OSCE's job to help to realize the purposes and principles of the United Nations in the context of its mandate and the area within its purview. We are ready to cooperate constructively with the Italian chairship of the OSCE and we share its desire to strengthen multilateralism for peace, security, stability and cooperation among the States of the region. We have great expectations for the increased cooperation between the OSCE and the United Nations, especially considering what has already been achieved so far. We have especially noted the intensive collaboration between the OSCE secretariat's Transnational Threats Department and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in combating the illegal trade in drugs and small arms, terrorism, organized crime, corruption and money-laundering, as well as in countering human trafficking and illegal migration. An important area of cooperation between the two organizations is the implementation of the Security Council's anti-terrorism resolutions, as well as in fighting the ideology of terrorism, as is provided for in resolution 2354 (2017).

In the area of international security information, the OSCE complements the global United Nations efforts to develop confidence-building measures through the use of information and communications technologies. We urge it to join efforts to develop and implement additional concrete confidence-building measures in the interests of providing cybersecurity. Those platforms should not be used for unfounded accusations in that regard.

We value cooperation between the United Nations and the OSCE on the ground, as has occurred through its Mission in Kosovo, as well as their collaboration in the Geneva talks on Transcaucasia aimed at establishing a direct dialogue between Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. We support the Italian chairship's priority of continuing the OSCE's efforts to assist in settling regional conflicts, and we are willing to cooperate with settlements for Transnistria and Nagorno Karabakh.

We did not plan to talk specifically today about the situation in Ukraine outside the context of the OSCE's activity. Ultimately, it is far from the only issue it is dealing with. However, the statements by a number of representatives have compelled us to bring it up.

In order to understand the reason for the deteriorating situation in Ukraine, we have to go back practically to the very beginning and recall how the problems in Ukraine first started. Our assessments of the origin and current situation of what I emphasize is an internal Ukrainian crisis do not coincide, to put it mildly. Four years ago, with the direct involvement of the West, there was a coup d'état in Ukraine. Those who came to power decided to rid Ukraine of everything Russian and the Russian language that was native to millions of the country's citizens, and to tie them to a paradigm of development to which they never consented and could not accept. There was absolutely no desire for reconciliation with the new authorities in Crimea or eastern Ukraine. Crimeans freely chose unification with Russia. In Donbas they were attacked with bullets and shells.

For the whole of those four years, Kyiv has not only been at war with its own citizens, it has persistently cultivated hatred for Russia in society and has permitted an orgy of nationalism and xenophobia, with the full connivance of our Western partners. Without Kyiv's acknowledgement of the depravity of those policies, it is unlikely that anything will change for the better. The key to resolving the problems in Ukraine lies in the hands of the Ukrainians themselves, and only the Ukrainians. But Kyiv chose a convenient formula, dumping the blame for all of its problems and its unwillingness to engage in a dialogue with its own citizens on the infamous Russian aggression, which no one has been able to present evidence of. And of course the Western curators are hardly burning with a desire to put Kyiv on a constructive path.

Resolution 2202 (2015) enshrined the Minsk agreements as the basis for settling the situation in Ukraine. However, right from the beginning, Kyiv worked to sabotage the process and rewrite the agreements' intentions, while the recently passed law on the so-called reintegration of Donbas has officially buried the Minsk package of measures. We can cite

numerous other examples of the provocative actions of the Ukrainian authorities, such as their discriminatory language policy, the indulging of neo-Nazist movements, the countless violation of laws by its own citizens and the fomenting of hatred against Russia. They turn a blind eye to the scandalous vandalism of Russian cultural centres; seizing Russian businesses has virtually become official policy; and they have created an atmosphere of totalitarian suppression of all opposition voices. Opposition journalists are being murdered, and I could continue this list. But the West prefers not to notice. The Kyiv authorities have been indulged by their sponsors and given carte blanche to say and do whatever they feel like. As long as that continues and Kyiv continues to undermine the Minsk agreements, as long as it refuses to talk directly to its own citizens while falsely presenting Russia as a party to the conflict but not themselves — alas, we can expect nothing good and no genuine settlement.

For our part, we are directly interested in normalizing the situation in Ukraine as soon as possible, and we are doing everything we can to facilitate that. But I would like to remind everyone, including those who spoke today, that before Ukraine can regain control of its borders, it must first comply with the political elements of the agreements, which are a condition for regaining that control, and not the other way around. That is what the Minsk agreements say. I advise those who are so fond of referring to them to read them again.

We support the efforts of the OSCE in the Trilateral Contact Group and the work of the Special Monitoring Mission in Donbas, which is acting as the international observer for the implementation by the parties — Kyiv, Donetsk and Luhansk — of the Minsk agreements, which are the sole basis for a settlement of the crisis in Ukraine, as affirmed in resolution 2202 (2015). We hope that the Italian chairship will continue to ensure the objectivity of the work of the Special Monitoring Mission, as well as focusing the OSCE's representatives in the Contact Group on developing a direct dialogue among the parties to the conflict.

In conclusion, I would like to once again emphasize that Russia sees the OSCE as an important mechanism for building an equal and indivisible system of pan-European security and wants to strengthen its role and prestige. We believe firmly that in order to increase the OSCE's prestige, it is essential to define its priorities. The necessity for reform is long overdue. At issue are its adoption of a charter and rules for its executive structures' operations, as well as introducing order and transparency in many other areas. It is not an exaggeration to say that strengthening the OSCE and ensuring that it attains the current goal, as outlined in Astana in 2010, of establishing a free, democratic and indivisible security association from Vancouver to Vladivostok, is in the interests of all States Members of the United Nations. We urge it to concern itself not with imaginary threats but with real ones. We all know what they are. Instead, we should think together about a renewed long-term international security system that would be built on the principles of respect for the interests of other countries, international law and the key role of the United Nations.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China welcomes the presence in the Security Council today of Mr. Angelino Alfano, Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy, and we thank him for his briefing.

All over the world, a wide spectrum of challenges with increasingly complex risks are quickly emerging. No country can respond to them alone, and no country can remain immune. Global issues require global solutions. Collective security requires collective maintenance. While the United Nations is at the core of the international collective-security architecture, regional and subregional organizations also enjoy unique advantages in resolving regional hot-spot issues. China supports enhancing the cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations, in accordance with Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, with the aim of jointly maintaining international peace and security. The cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations should firmly uphold the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations while working diligently to address hot-spot issues through dialogue and consultation and engaging actively in preventive diplomacy with the aim of defusing and resolving disputes peacefully.

The OSCE is an important partner of the United Nations. In recent years it has been actively engaged in preventive diplomacy, promoting security and mutual trust among countries in the region and mediating regional disputes, efforts that China appreciates and applauds. We welcome Italy's decision to designate dialogue, ownership and responsibility as its working

motto during its chairship-in-office, and to respond actively to terrorism, illicit smuggling, transnational crimes and refugee crises, among other challenges. China supports practical and effective cooperation between the Security Council and the OSCE in the areas of peace and security, and we are eager to see the OSCE continue to play an active and constructive role in upholding regional peace, security and stability.

We welcome all the positive efforts being made by all the parties concerned, including the OSCE, to find a peaceful solution to the Ukrainian issue. We hope that all the parties concerned will work to fully implement the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Minsk agreements, with the aim of reaching a comprehensive, lasting and balanced solution to the question of Ukraine through dialogue and consultation. The international community should continue to support the diplomatic efforts of all the parties concerned to arrive at a political settlement of the Ukrainian issue so as to collectively restore peace, stability and development in Ukraine as soon as possible.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

I would first like to pay tribute to Foreign Minister Alfano for his briefing today in his capacity as Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE.). It is a privilege to see him back in the Council during the second year of our split term. The cooperation between the Governments of Italy and the Netherlands during our split term on the Council for 2017 and 2018 is a great example of European cooperation and political leadership.

Today I will focus on three points — the OSCE as a regional security organization, the OSCE as an organization for dialogue and the situation in Ukraine. As a crucial regional organization, the OSCE complements the work of the Security Council on the basis of Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations. It plays a central role in early warning, conflict prevention and resolution in the region. It also plays a crucial role in the quest for peaceful settlements of the protracted conflicts on the territories of Georgia, Moldova and Azerbaijan, which must be resolved in accordance with international laws and OSCE commitments.

My second point concerns the OSCE as an organization for dialogue, whereby it offers its 57 participating States a unique platform for promoting peaceful solutions to conflicts in Europe, based on commonly agreed principles. Through its comprehensive security approach, the organization is able to deal with all the dimensions of security, including its political, military, economic, environmental, and human aspects. Its field offices and independent institutions — the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Representative on Freedom of the Media, and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights — play an important role in that regard that I would like to highlight. In this way, the OSCE provides space for dialogue within all three dimensions, and does so in an inclusive manner.

That brings me to my third point, the situation in eastern Ukraine. The ongoing foreign interference in Ukraine constitutes a serious violation of the founding principles of the OSCE. I reiterate my country's full commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. We call on all the parties involved to fully implement the Minsk agreements. That should begin with the withdrawal of heavy weapons and a sustainable ceasefire. The OSCE's role in the Trilateral Contact Group and the Special Monitoring Mission are crucial to the implementation of the Minsk agreements. It is absolutely essential that the Special Monitoring Mission be allowed to do its important work without impediments. The monitors must have full, safe and unhindered access to all parts of the conflict zone. Any obstructions of the Mission's work or threats to its staff are unacceptable and must stop immediately.

In the context of Ukraine, the Kingdom of the Netherlands would like to recall resolution 2166 (2014), which demanded that those responsible for the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 be held to account and that all States cooperate fully with the efforts to establish accountability. We mourn the victims of the downing of MH17 and would like to express our sympathy with their families and loved ones.

In conclusion, today is 8 March, International Women's Day. In that context, I particularly welcome Mr. Alfano's words highlighting the importance of gender equality, in line with the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality. We greatly appreciate Italy's active role in initiating a network of Mediterranean women mediators, through which we believe it will move the OSCE forward in that area. As OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, we believe that Italy will build bridges as successfully as it did during its time on

the Council. We pay tribute to its leadership both at the OSCE and the United Nations.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

The meeting rose at 4.45 p.m.

The meeting was called to order at 11.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I would like to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. António Guterres, and to give him the floor.

The Secretary-General: I am here to report on the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018), which the Council adopted unanimously on 24 February. But I am keenly aware that I am doing so just as the bloodletting in Syria enters its eighth year. I would like to highlight just one stark fact on this grimmest of anniversaries, which is that in 2017, more children were killed in Syria than in any other year since the war began. I am deeply saddened by the immense loss and cascading suffering of the Syrian people. And I am deeply disappointed by all those who, year after year, by action or inaction, design or indifference, have allowed this to happen.

My grief and frustration are compounded by all that I know of the people of Syria. As United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the aftermath of the Iraq war, I saw the remarkable hospitality of the Syrian people in hosting 1.5 million Iraqi refugees — not in camps, but in their communities across the country. Syria was a place where refugees could live in security as they tried to rebuild their lives and raise their families. Today, so many of those generous Syrians who shared so much have themselves been forced from their homes, becoming refugees or internally displaced. In neighbouring countries — whose enormous hospitality I have also witnessed, but who are burdened by overwhelming needs — the vast majority of Syrian refugees live below the poverty line. Many of the Syrians who journeyed even farther from home in search of safety have found the doors that they once opened to others in need shut in their faces. A country known for its ancient civilization and a people known for their rich diversity have been betrayed, and Syria is bleeding inside and out. There should be one agenda only for all of us — ending the suffering of the Syrian people and finding a political solution to the conflict. And the Council has a particular responsibility in that regard.

Let me now turn to the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) and the issue of the compliance of all the relevant parties in Syria. I do so with a caveat. The United Nations is following developments closely, but we do not have the full picture, owing to our limited presence and restricted access on the ground. Resolution 2401 (2018) demands that all parties "cease hostilities without delay, and engage immediately to ensure full and comprehensive implementation ... for a durable humanitarian pause for at least 30 consecutive days throughout Syria", while still countering Da'esh and other groups designated as terrorists by the Council. It is true that in some areas, such as Deir ez-Zor and Douma, where there has been a recent ceasefire that I will address later, the conflict is diminishing in intensity. Yet there has been no cessation of hostilities. Violence continues in eastern Ghouta and beyond, including in Afrin, parts of Idlib and into Damascus and its suburbs. In eastern Ghouta in particular, the air strikes, shelling and ground offensives have intensified since the resolution's adoption and have claimed hundreds of civilian lives. Some reports even put the toll at more than 1,000.

The resolution further demands the enabling of "the safe, unimpeded and sustained delivery of humanitarian aid and services". Despite some limited convoy deliveries, the provision of humanitarian aid and services has been neither safe, unimpeded or sustained. The resolution calls on "all parties to immediately lift the sieges of populated areas, including in eastern Ghouta, Yarmouk, Fo'ah and Kafraya". No sieges have been lifted. The resolution demands medical evacuations of the critically sick and wounded. To our knowledge, not one critically sick or wounded person has so far been evacuated. But I will come back to that later in relation to a recent announcement. The resolution reiterates its demand "reminding in particular the Syrian authorities, that all parties immediately comply with their obligations under international law, including international human rights law, as applicable, and international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians". And I remind all involved that even efforts to combat groups identified as terrorists by the Council do not supersede those obligations. Yet we

see egregious violations, indiscriminate attacks and a failure to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure.

Since the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), my Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and I have been focused on helping to create the conditions for a cessation of hostilities in eastern Ghouta, where, as I said to the Council two weeks ago, people have been living in a hell on Earth (see S/PV.8185). As the Special Envoy told the Council a few days ago, eastern Ghouta is the most urgent situation, because it is where we have the clearest potential to try to support the de-escalation in concrete ways, and because we have been concretely approached. On 26 February, the Russian Federation announced a five-hour daily humanitarian pause in eastern Ghouta. I will speak to that later in my remarks.

On 27 February, the President of the Security Council and I received a letter from the Syrian National Committee conveying another letter from the three armed opposition groups in eastern Ghouta — Jaysh Al-Islam, Faylaq Al-Rahman and Ahrar Al-Sham. They expressed their commitment "to the full implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions, especially resolution 2401 (2018)", and to expelling from eastern Ghouta "the armed groups of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, the Al-Nusra Front and Al-Qaida and all of those belonging to them". They also promised to ensure humanitarian access and the facilitation of the work of United Nations agencies. On receiving the letter, the Office of the Special Envoy opened channels with all three groups, inside and outside the enclave. The respective commanders issued further letters, expressing the groups' readiness to negotiate with the Russian Federation in Geneva.

In parallel, both I and my Special Envoy engaged with the relevant authorities of the Russian Federation. My team on the ground did likewise, and also engaged with the Government of Syria. We offered the good offices of the United Nations to facilitate and observe any meeting between the representatives of the armed opposition groups, the Syrian Government and the Russian Federation. Despite our best efforts over the course of a few days, it was not possible to schedule any meeting.

Meanwhile, on 6 March, the Syrian Government addressed a letter to me and to the President of the Security Council. That letter stated that Syria positively welcomed resolution 2401 (2018), as it

> "stresses firm commitment to the Syrian State's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity in accordance with the provisions of the United Nations Charter and calls for implementing a humanitarian truce across Syria to ensure a safe, sustainable and unhindered access of humanitarian aid."

That same day, my Special Envoy informed the Russian Federation of his intention to invite the three armed opposition groups to a meeting with the Russian Federation in Geneva three days later. On 7 March, his interlocutors replied that they did not think a meeting in Geneva was the best option and were pursuing contacts on the ground with the relevant armed opposition groups.

As those diplomatic efforts were taking place, fighting went on. The Syrian Government and its allies intensified air strikes and launched a ground offensive, progressively gaining control of parts of eastern Ghouta from about 10 per cent of the enclave on 3 March to more than 60 per cent today. The offensive initially took place in less populated areas, steadily moving to urban centres and forcing large-scale displacement.

In the follow up to the efforts I have described, it was possible on 8 and 10 March to convene two meetings between Russian officials and Jaysh Al-Islam in the outskirts of eastern Ghouta, with the United Nations as an observer. In those meetings, progress was made in relation to the removal of a number of members of the Al-Nusra Front, as well as other aspects, including the potential for a ceasefire and improved humanitarian access. The first group of Al-Nusra Front fighters and their families were since evacuated from eastern Ghouta.

Nevertheless, it has not been possible to facilitate contact between the Russian authorities and Faylak Al-Rahman. The group insisted that the meeting take place in Geneva. The Russian Federation insisted that the meeting take place on the ground. On 10 March, Government forces intensified their offensive, capturing the city of Misraba in a movement aiming at dividing the enclave into three separate areas. On the evening of that same day, the Russian Federation informed the United Nations that a unilateral ceasefire would take place at midnight, in relation to Jaysh Al-Islam in Douma. It was agreed that a meeting would be held on 11 March with the facilitation of the United Nations. On that day, with the ceasefire between the Government

and Jaysh Al-Islam forces largely holding in Douma, the meeting took place, followed by a meeting today.

As I speak to the Council now, I have not yet received a full report on the results of today's meeting. But I was informed by our people in Damascus as I was entering the Chamber that there has been progress with regard to civilian evacuations and humanitarian aid. Furthermore, I take note of a statement issued today by Jaysh Al-Islam:

> "[i] n the context of Security Council resolutions 2254 (2015) and 2401 (2018), an agreement was reached with the Russian side through the United Nations for a humanitarian medical evacuation of the wounded for treatment outside of eastern Ghouta."

We are also hearing reports of tentative initiatives, both by tribal leaders and the Russian Federation, for contact with other groups on the ground. I wish to underscore the urgency of seeing medical evacuations, civilian protection and full, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, attacks on other parts of eastern Ghouta continue, with the enclave now split into three separate pockets. During this whole period, the shelling from eastern Ghouta to Damascus was also ongoing, causing dozens of civilian deaths and injuries, with some reports putting the number close to 100.

My Special Envoy and I have remained apprised at each step of the diplomatic engagement, offering support and guidance to ensure the implementation in letter and spirit of the resolution. In short, as my Special Envoy has said to the Council, we are leaving no stone unturned in trying to bring all major stakeholders to the table and contribute in a concrete fashion to find a sustainable solution for the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018).

As the situation continues to unfold, the Turkish offensive in Afrin — pursued with armed opposition group allies — intensified with air strikes and ground advances against Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat/People's Protection Units fighters, reinforced, in turn, by elements coming from eastern Syria, where they were combating Da'esh. Pro-Syrian Government forces have also deployed inside of Afrin. The fighting resulted in significant civilian displacement, with reports of numerous casualties and damage to infrastructure. With the cooperation of Syrian armed opposition groups, Turkish forces established a so-called buffer zone inside Syrian territory, linking northern rural Aleppo and Idlib, and surrounding Afrin from three sides. The offensive is now pushing ever closer towards the city, with its large civilian population.

Allow me to now turn to our efforts to address the humanitarian crisis. When resolution 2401 (2018) was adopted, the United Nations and its humanitarian partners stood ready to deliver. Plans were in place for multiple convoys each week to agreed-upon locations, in response to independently assessed needs. Unfortunately, the actual delivery did not match our plan. Let me describe what it was possible to do in the past two weeks.

On 1 March, humanitarian organizations delivered assistance to some 50,000 people in the hard-to-reach areas of Afrin and Tell Rifaat, north of Aleppo. On 4 March, a convoy of 19 trucks organized by the United Nations, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and partners reached Dar Kabira, in northern Homs. It provided assistance to 33,500 people of the requested 40,250. However, the Government of Syria did not allow the delivery of life-saving medicines, such as insulin, nor key items, including solar lamps, syringes and paediatric scales.

As I mentioned earlier, in eastern Ghouta, the Russian Federation unilaterally announced a daily five-hour humanitarian pause in the fighting, starting from 27 February, to prevent civilian victims and to enable civilians to leave the enclave. In reality, few civilians left. On the one hand, sufficient protection standards were not in place for voluntary movement. Moreover, armed groups prevented others from leaving.

In that context, even though the five-hour window was insufficient to enable the safe, unimpeded and sustained delivery of humanitarian aid and services, as demanded in the resolution, on 5 March the United Nations sent an inter-agency convoy of 46 trucks to Douma, in eastern Ghouta, with food for 27,500 people, along with health and nutrition supplies. Yet those 27,500 represented only a third of the requested beneficiaries, all in desperate need. And most of the health supplies were removed by the Syrian authorities, including basic medicines, dialysis treatments and trauma and surgical materials, such as burn dressings and adrenaline, despite the provisions of paragraph 8 of resolution 2401 (2018).

According to the World Health Organization, only about 30 per cent of medical supplies in the convoy

were allowed in. United Nations personnel from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs accompanying the convoy were also denied access to eastern Ghouta. Violence rendered the operation extremely perilous, despite prior assurances from the parties to the conflict. The insecurity forced the team to reluctantly halt unloading and to return to Damascus with a large share of the food aid still on the trucks.

On 9 March, a convoy of 13 trucks reached Douma, delivering the remaining food assistance that could not be offloaded four days earlier. Once again, shelling occurred nearby, despite assurances having been provided by all parties. In those difficult circumstances, I commend the valiant humanitarian workers risking their lives to provide assistance and protection to people in need.

But we are obviously far from safe, unimpeded and sustained delivery of humanitarian aid, as demanded in resolution 2401 (2018), as well as other relevant Security Council resolutions. And so the humanitarian and human rights situation is becoming more desperate by the day. In Douma, relief workers who reached the city last week described conditions as shocking and overwhelming. People are sheltering in overcrowded basements. Access to food, water and sanitation is limited. In relation to Douma, we have a convoy ready that I hope will be allowed to proceed in the coming days, especially after the results of today's meeting.

As in all conflict settings, the specific needs of women are not receiving sufficient attention, including access to safe spaces, critical health services, medicine and baby formula for their children. In eastern Ghouta, health partners on the ground advise that more than 1,000 people are in urgent need of medical evacuation. The United Nations is ready to support these medical evacuations, in cooperation with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and other partners. A prioritized list of those in greatest need, mostly children, has been shared with the Syrian authorities. I urge a positive response, hoping that today's meeting will allow these actions to take place in the immediate future.

The Syrian Arab Red Crescent has announced its intention to send a relief convoy to Afrin as soon as security conditions allows. A United Nations humanitarian mission is awaiting Government authorization to immediately deploy to Raqqa for assessments of security and needs. There are also new disturbing allegations of the use of chlorine gas. Even if we cannot verify them, we cannot ignore them. I continue to urge the Council to find unity on this issue.

Having said what I said, I believe that despite all the difficulties, lack of trust, mutual suspicions and cold calculations, it should be possible to implement resolution 2401 (2018). It should be possible to have a cessation of hostilities. It should be possible to deliver aid. It should be possible to evacuate the sick and wounded. It should be possible to lift the sieges. It should be possible to accelerate humanitarian mine action throughout Syria. It should also be possible to remove Security Council-listed terrorist fighters from conflict zones without massive and indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure.

We cannot give up, for the sake of the Syrian people. I appeal to all parties to ensure the full implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) throughout the whole of Syrian territory. The United Nations is ready to assist in any effort to make that happen. I call on all States with influence to exercise it in support of the efforts of the United Nations and the implementation of the resolution. I hope that this week's Astana ministerial meeting, which will gather the guarantors of de-escalation, will concretely restore de-escalation arrangements, and take real steps on detainees, abductees and missing persons. The dramatic situation I have described — the calamity across the country, the rivalries, the cynicism, the cruelty — highlight the need for a political solution. My Special Envoy continues to work towards the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015).

On Thursday, the conflict will enter its eighth year. I refuse to lose my hope to see Syria rising from the ashes. To see a united, democratic Syria able to avoid fragmentation and sectarianism and with its sovereignty and territorial integrity respected, and to see a Syrian people able to freely decide their future and choose their political leadership.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Recalling the Security Council's latest note 507 on its working methods (S/2017/507), I wish to encourage all participants, both members and non-members of the Council, to deliver their statements in five minutes or less.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I deliver this speech today on behalf of Kuwait and Sweden.

At the outset I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting at the request of the delegations of Kuwait and Sweden, pursuant to resolution 2401 (2018). I also thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his presence here today and for his briefing about the implementation of this resolution.

Fifteen days have passed since the Security Council's unanimous adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), which demands that all parties implement a 30-day ceasefire throughout Syria without delay in order to deliver humanitarian assistance to those in need and to end the siege of residential areas. It is with great regret that we continue to witness a clear failure to implement the resolution's provisions while military operations across Syria continue to prevent humanitarian and medical assistance, particularly in eastern Ghouta and specifically on the part of the Syrian authorities. This has prevented United Nations teams and their humanitarian partners from safely providing humanitarian assistance to eastern Ghouta, which has been a primary locus among Syrian areas in need of assistance ever since its siege began in 2013, and which is home to about 400,000 people. In this regard, we would like to make a number of observations, as follows.

First, we have followed with deep concern the inability of the United Nations and its humanitarian partners to enter the besieged areas, and the obstacles and impediments that they have faced during their operations in some areas. In that regard, we would refer to events in Douma, eastern Ghouta, on 5 March, which proved to be the deadliest day since the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), with at least 100 people having been killed on that day alone. On that day, the hopes of civilians hinged on receiving lifesaving humanitarian aid, and we looked forward to that first positive initiative reaching 90,000 people in need of assistance in eastern Ghouta.

However, what happened was that the number of beneficiaries dropped to less than half due to the Syrian authorities having removed necessary medical supplies from the convoy's load without clear justification, despite the fact that they had been given prior notification, based on standard operating procedures, of the entirety of the humanitarian convoy's content. It is also a matter of deep concern that convoys administered by the United Nations and its partners were compelled to cease their operations before completely unloading their cargo due to continued aerial bombardment on Douma. We demand that the Syrian authorities give immediate permission for two convoys per week to eastern Ghouta and other destinations, at the request of the United Nations. We call on all parties to provide appropriate security guarantees for these convoys and to permit United Nations staff to accompany the convoys.

In this regard, we reaffirm the need for all parties, in particular the Syrian authorities, to assume their responsibilities to protect all humanitarian workers, including United Nations agencies and their relevant partners. We welcome the entry of the remaining humanitarian convoys provided by the Red Cross and the World Food Program into Douma on 9 March to deliver the remaining food assistance. This was the second time such convoys had been allowed to enter Douma in one week. There is a need to build on this so as to increase the number of weekly convoys to eastern Ghouta in a sustainable manner.

Secondly, we reiterate the Council's demand for immediate unconditional medical evacuations based on medical need, starting this week, and we call on the Syrian authorities to give permission and work with the United Nations and its implementing partners to that end.

Thirdly, the continued fighting in eastern Ghouta, particularly the incessant air strikes, prompts us to again call specifically on the Syrian authorities to comply with the provisions of the resolution and of international law in order to facilitate humanitarian assistance to reach those in need. We believe that a daily five-hour truce in eastern Ghouta does not support the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018).

Fourthly, the United Nations has confirmed that the number of combatants associated with terrorist groups designated by the Security Council in eastern Ghouta does not exceed 350. We cannot accept continued military operations under the pretext of combating terrorism when they effectively prevent the delivery of humanitarian assistance, contrary to the requirements of the resolution. Resolution 2401 (2018), which was adopted unanimously, took effect immediately and is applicable to all parties. In that regard, we note the willingness of certain opposition groups in eastern Ghouta to abide by the provisions of the resolution and to expel terrorist groups designated by the Security Council. We express our support for the

efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, to operationalize this matter without delay.

Fifthly, listening to the Secretary-General's briefing today on the status of the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) constitutes one of the monitoring tools included in the resolution. But the main mechanisms remain the existing ceasefire agreements between the parties to the conflict, most notably the Astana accord with Russia, Turkey and Iran as its guarantors, and the agreement supervised by the United States and the Russian Federation that emanated from the International Syria Support Group. The resolution stresses the need to activate those agreements in order to reach a 30-day ceasefire aimed at allowing sustainable access to humanitarian assistance in all regions in Syria. We call again on the parties to those agreements to redouble their efforts in order to implement the provisions of resolution 2401 (2018).

The unanimous position that the Security Council conveyed to the Syrian people and to the world by adopting resolution 2401 (2018) on 24 February must be built on in a speedy and effective manner, especially as the resolution is primarily of a humanitarian nature. There is a collective responsibility on us as members of the Security Council, specifically on influential parties, to maintain our credibility before the world and work to implement the provisions of resolution 2401 (2018). We would like here to stress that the provisions of the resolution are valid even after 30 days from the date of its adoption.

We affirm our full commitment to continue to closely follow the status of the implementation of the resolution in the Council monthly reports. We will spare no effort to make progress on its implementation. This month marks the beginning of the eighth year of the conflict in Syria. Sadly, there is still a need for the violence to cease, for sustained humanitarian access through weekly cross-line convoys, for medical evacuations, for the protection of civilians and hospitals and for lifting the siege. We cannot let the Syrian people down, and we will continue to strive to implement the joint demands that we have set out.

Finally, we recall that the lack of a political settlement to the conflict in Syria based on resolution 2254 (2015) will lead to further deterioration of the humanitarian situation.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I would like to congratulate the Netherlands and your team, Mr. President, on having assumed the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I also want to thank Secretary-General Guterres for his briefing and for all of his efforts on behalf of peace in Syria

Sixteen days ago, we sat around the negotiating table with our Security Council colleagues and agreed to a 30-day ceasefire in the brutal bombardment of civilians in Syria. The negotiations were long and difficult. Every minute we delayed meant more innocent people were killed. But the Russian delegation stalled and drew out the talks. They had conditions they insisted on before they would allow the killing to stop. The United States was reluctant to accept those conditions. But, in order to stop the killing in Syria, we accepted them. We attempted to work with Russia in good faith to end the violence in Syria.

As a result, 16 days ago we came to an agreement. Russia cast its vote in favour of the agreement (see S/PV.8188). With that vote Russia promised its support for a 30-day cease-fire, as did the rest of the members of the security Council. With that vote Russia said that it too wanted to create the conditions for food and medicine to reach starving Syrian families. With that vote Russia told us it would use its influence with the Syrian regime to silence the guns in Syria. It told us that the Russians would themselves honour the ceasefire they voted to demand. With that vote Russia made a commitment to us, to the Syrian people and to the world — a commitment to stop the killing in Syria.

Today we know that the Russians did not keep their commitment. Today we see their actions do not match those commitments, as bombs continue dropping on the children of eastern Ghouta. Today we must ask whether Russia can no longer influence the Al-Assad regime to stop the horrific destruction of hospitals, medical clinics and ambulances and to stop dropping chemical weapons on villages. Has the situation in Syria reversed, and Russia is now the tool of Al-Assad — or worse, Iran?

We must ask those questions because we know the Russians themselves have continued their own bombing. In the first four days following the ceasefire, Russian military aircraft conducted at least 20 daily bombing missions in Damascus and eastern Ghouta. The Russians negotiated the wording of the ceasefire down to the commas and the periods. They voted for the

ceasefire. And they immediately disregarded it. In the past 16 days, over 500 civilians have died. Some reports put the death toll even higher. That is unacceptable.

Thousands of Syrians are in desperate need of medical care. But none of the United Nations list has been evacuated. We have heard the conversations are ongoing with the regime to medically evacuate 25 people in the coming weeks. While those civilians should be rushed to medical care, we ask why it took so long. When will the more than 1,000 identified medical cases be evacuated? There have been almost no deliveries of medicine or surgical equipment, because the Al-Assad regime remove them from the United Nations humanitarian convoys.

The convoy that made it to eastern Ghouta on 5 March had to navigate around constant regime airstrikes. The bombing was so severe that the United Nations could barely unload the food the trucks were carrying. And in the past 16 days, there have been three separate allegations of chlorine-gas attacks. This is no ceasefire. This is the Al-Assad regime, Iran and Russia continuing to wage war against their political opponents.

And there is another reason we know the Syrians and Russians never intended to implement the ceasefire: they planned for it. Over the past two weeks, the Russian and Syrian regimes have been busy labelling every opposition group in eastern Ghouta a "terrorist group". Why? So they can exploit a provision in the ceasefire resolution (resolution 2401 (2018)) that allows for military operations against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and Al-Qaida. There are terrorists in Syria, but the Russian and Syrian regimes label anyone as terrorists who resist their absolute control.

In the eyes of Russia, Iran and Al-Assad, the neighbourhoods of eastern Ghouta are full of terrorists. The hospitals are full of terrorists. The schools are full of terrorists. The Syrian and Russian regimes insist that they are targeting terrorists, but their bombs and artillery continue to fall on hospitals and schools and on innocent civilians. They have deliberately and with premeditation exploited a loophole they negotiated in the ceasefire to continue starving and pummelling hundreds of thousands of innocent Syrian civilians. They have made a mockery of this process and this institution. For the sake of the Syrian people and the integrity of the Council, we must respond and take action.

During the negotiations, the United States put all parties on notice that we needed to act if the ceasefire was not honoured. Members of the Security Council agreed. Now that day has come. The ceasefire has failed. The situation of the civilians in eastern Ghouta is dire. The United States is acting. We have drafted a new ceasefire draft resolution that provides no room for evasion. It is simple, straightforward and binding. It will take effect immediately upon adoption by the Council. It contains no counter-terrorism loopholes for Al-Assad, Iran and the Russians to hide behind. And it focuses on the area the Secretary-General has identified and that the world can see holds the greatest urgency for the lives of innocent civilians, that is, Damascus city and eastern Ghouta.

If Russia, Iran and Al-Assad cannot agree to stop the bombing in that limited part of Syria for that limited amount of time, they will not agree to anything that is worthwhile. If they will not keep their word once they have agreed to a ceasefire, then how can we trust them? In the end, that is what makes the work of the Council possible: trust. If we cannot count on the members of the Council to honour their agreements, we cannot accomplish anything. If we cannot act when children are dying, we have no business being here. If we cannot save families that have not seen the sun for weeks because they have been hiding underground to escape barrel bombs, then the Security Council is as impotent as its worst critics say it is.

Almost a year ago in the aftermath of the Syrian regime sarin gas attack on Khan Shaykhoun, the United States offered a warning to the Council. We said that when the international community consistently fails to act, there are times when States are compelled to take their own action. The Security Council failed to act, and the United States successfully struck the air base from which Al-Assad had launched his chemical attack. We repeat that warning today.

We welcome all nations that will work together to finally provide relief for the Syrian people, and we support the United Nations political process that seeks to end the war in Syria. However, we also warn that any nation that is determined to impose its will through chemical attacks and inflicting human suffering, most especially the outlaw Syrian regime, the United States remains prepared to act if we must. It is not the path we prefer, but it is a path we have demonstrated we will take. We are prepared to take it again.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and, through him, may I thank all of those trying to supply the desperately needed humanitarian response on the ground. They are indeed valiant.

Sixteen days ago, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2401 (2018). We did so because we and the world were sickened by the slaughter of innocents in Syria, particularly in eastern Ghouta. Russia used every tactic in its playbook to weaken the resolution and buy time for its ally, the Al-Assad regime, to bomb indiscriminately. But when it raises its hand in support, we hope that Russia and its clients would keep their word and implement the resolution.

Sadly, as the Secretary-General's briefing has made clear, our resolution has not been implemented. What has happened? First, has there been a ceasefire? No. The violence continues and civilian deaths continue to rise. In those 16 days, 607 people have reportedly been killed, including 99 children and 79 women. The opposition armed groups committed to implementing resolution 2401 (2018) in full, but the Al-Assad regime's air strikes continue.

Despite voting for a ceasefire, between 24 and 28 February, Russian military aircraft conducted 20 bombing missions in eastern Ghouta and Damascus every day. Russia has failed to confirm that it is only conducting air strikes against groups that are listed as terrorist groups by the Council. During the so-called daily humanitarian pause, over 56 air strikes hit eastern Ghouta between 27 February and 7 March, including at least six air strikes by Russian aircraft, according to monitors on the ground.

Let us recall that only last year Russia declared the whole area to be a de-escalation zone. It has claimed that its bombardments are about fighting terrorists. That is manifestly not the case. There is one terrorist group recognized by the Security Council in eastern Ghouta, which accounts for less than not even 1 per cent of the population of the enclave. The other fighters are members of the opposition armed groups, which Russia has itself invited to the Astana meetings. Those groups have written stating their readiness to expel Al-Nusra Front from the enclave. Instead, Russia bombs them, undermining the political process that it is a part of. We are pleased that the members of the High Negotiations Committee of the Syrian opposition will be able to discuss the situation in Syria with Council members later today. I repeat my consistent condemnation of attacks against Damascus.

What about our resolution's second demand, that is, safe, unimpeded and sustained access for humanitarian convoys, including medical and surgical supplies? Only one convoy has been able to enter besieged eastern Ghouta in the past 16 days, in two movements following shelling. They delivered supplies for 27,500 people — a fraction of the 400,000 civilians besieged in eastern Ghouta.

What is stopping the aid from getting to the people that so desperately need it? Again, it is the regime. The ongoing violence that it perpetrates is an important factor, and its failure to grant access is another. On 5 March, the regime removed nearly 70 per cent of the medical supplies from a humanitarian convoy destined for 90,000 people. That happened at a time when the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is warning that malnutrition and disease are so prevalent that people will soon die from hunger and sickness even more than from air strikes. Finally, have there been any medical evacuations for the approximately 1,000 people who need them? Not a single one. Again, it is the regime that will not permit its civilians to reach urgently needed medical care.

Some may point to an aid convoy or an announced pause in air strikes as a sign of improvement, and claim that those actions implement the resolution. They do not. Our resolution was clear: a ceasefire without delay, humanitarian access and medical evacuations. None have happened. Instead, the truth is that the regime will continue to pound eastern Ghouta until it has a complete military victory there, and Russia will continue to protect its ally, whatever the cost to the people of Syria and its own reputation.

As we sit here, watching Al-Assad inscribing eastern Ghouta, again, on the roll call of atrocities and war crimes that he has committed over the eight years of the bloody conflict, let me say clearly that there will be future accountability for those crimes, and Russia's role, bombing alongside him and protecting him from accountability, will never be forgotten. There is still time. If Russia is able to announce a five-hour ceasefire, it can announce a full ceasefire. If it can get one aid convoy through, it can get more through. I urge Russia to give its unconditional support to resolution 2401 (2018) and a ceasefire to enable the delivery of humanitarian

assistance, respect international humanitarian law and protect civilians.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to thank the Secretary-General for his strong and particularly enlightening briefing, as well as for his personal commitment, in addition to that of the staff of the Secretariat and Mr. Staffan de Mistura, to spare no effort in implementing resolution 2401 (2018). Allow me, on behalf of France, to especially commend the United Nations teams and all the humanitarian actors working under extremely difficult conditions in Syria.

Two weeks ago, we unanimously adopted a text calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities of at least 30 days, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access and medical evacuations in Syria. I would remind those present that those demands apply to the whole of Syria and all parties. We negotiated the text together for several weeks and, I repeat, unanimously adopted it. Each member of the Council around this table has therefore endorsed the content by deciding to assume responsibility. That responsibility fell particularly on Russia, as a permanent member that voted for resolution 2401 (2018), sponsor of the Astana talks and a Power engaged in the Syrian situation, as it claims to be.

We had agreed to a clause to meet 15 days later to review its implementation. The Secretary-General has just provided us with a very clear picture of that. Since 24 February, civilian casualties have continued to climb into the hundreds every week. The regime is pursuing, in defiance of its people and the Council, an air and land offensive that it has never intended to halt, with the support of Russia and Iran. However, let us not be deceived that civilians are not the "collateral victims" of those military operations. Rather, they are themselves being targeted by the regime, deliberately and methodically to starve and rape, destroy their health centres, kill and sow terror and death. The hell on Earth experienced by eastern Ghouta is not just the effect of the regime's policy; it is the very purpose of the regime's murderous madness, with its daily tally of war crimes and crimes against humanity, for which the regime will have to answer.

Let us call a spade a spade: Who can stop the Syrian regime? Everyone knows that, apart from a military operation, it is Russia that is in the best position to do so today. It is therefore legitimate that today, more than ever before, everyone looks expectantly towards Russia, which has so far been unwilling, or unable, to exert sufficient pressure on the regime.

Two weeks after the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), we are here in the Chamber to face the facts. First, what has happened since the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018)? In the light of the inexorable worsening of the humanitarian situation in eastern Ghouta, the Security Council has rallied around a cessation of hostilities and made every effort to seek consensus, and finally did reach consensus on 24 February. We knew then, and we said so, that this result was only a precondition, and that the longest and most difficult part of the path towards a humanitarian truce was still before us. However, every day since 24 February the fighting has continued. In the days that followed, despite Russia's unilateral announcement of a daily five-hour truce — well below what resolution 2401 (2018) requires — the intensity of the fighting has increased. Since resolution 2401 (2018) was adopted, there has not been a single day when eastern Ghouta, an enclave that has been starved and besieged for months, has not been bombed by the regime and its supporters. The fight against terrorism — and this cannot be repeated enough — cannot be used as a pretext for such a bloodbath of civilians or for such contempt for international humanitarian law.

Eastern Ghouta is now a textbook case of war crimes, and even of crimes against humanity. It cannot be ignored: the Syrian regime, with the support of Russia and Iran, is engaged in a war of total submission against its people. Violations of the ceasefire by the Damascus regime, with the support of Russia and Iran, have been massive and ongoing, and I would like to thank the Secretary-General for clearly exposing those violations. Let me briefly review some of these violations.

Between 24 and 27 February, 72 attacks by the Syrian regime and its Russian and Iranian allies, from more than 14 locations, were reported. Between 24 and 28 February, Russian military aircraft carried out no fewer than 20 bombing missions in Damascus and eastern Ghouta. Between 27 February and 2 March, field observers documented at least 25 air strikes by the regime and Russia during the five-hour humanitarian breaks declared by Moscow. Since 18 February, more than 29 hospital have been hit, and few health facilities are still in operation. On 8 March, a health care facility in Mesraba was completely destroyed by bombardments. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, as of 11 March, 607 people, including 99 children and 79 women, had been killed since the adoption of resolution

2401 (2018). I would repeat: 607 people have been killed. In addition to the dead, there are many injured persons, arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, rapes and many other intolerable violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. Finally, further credible allegations of the use of chemical weapons have been made since the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018). As the highest French authorities have pointed out, France will brook no compromise when it comes to the use of those abject weapons.

The humanitarian needs are immense, yet the regime deliberately continues to block the entry of aid, despite the presence of Russian soldiers at the crossing points, as what happened to the convoy on 5 March shows. Indeed, the population continues to be deprived of relief and of any possibility of medical evacuation, even if more than 1,000 people need it.

Still, we cannot give up. On behalf of France, I would like to make a new and urgent appeal to those who can make a difference on the ground, starting with Russia. France is not posing; it is taking action. My country has been and remains one of the countries most committed to the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018). Right after the resolution's adoption, France stepped up its contacts and efforts at the highest level so as to contribute to the resolution's swift implementation, so that the Astana guarantors would assume their responsibilities and so that the commitments made collectively would be respected. President Macron has met with Presidents Putin, Erdoğan and Rouhani, as well as with the Secretary-General on several occasions. Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian visited Moscow and then Tehran. To Russia, we proposed concrete measures for implementing resolution 2401 (2018).

Although our efforts aimed at reaching out have been ignored, we stand by our proposals. Let us not deceive ourselves: without an immediate implementation of resolution 2401 (2018), the worst is yet to come. After the regime has conquered the rural zones of eastern Ghouta, the worst would be a conquest — street by street, house by house — in a torrent of fire, for the urban zones of the region, which are by definition the most densely populated areas. It is of the highest urgency, therefore, for us to come together to ensure that the resolution is fully implemented before the street battles promised by the regime's military planners begin. I would like to highlight three essential elements in that regard.

The first is implementing a monitoring system to ensure maximum pressure on the parties. The main reason resolution 2401 (2018) has not been not implemented is that the Syrian regime has been engaged in its murderous folly and the regime's supporters have been unable or unwilling to stop it and prevent a worsening of the humanitarian situation. But the failure to implement resolution 2401 (2018) is also the result of our not being able to put in place a sufficiently targeted follow-up mechanism to the resolution in the Council. This must be our priority, and I am convinced that it is our only chance to compel the Syrian regime to comply with its international obligations. France therefore calls for appropriate decisions to be taken in the coming days.

It is essential and urgent that humanitarian convoys reach eastern Ghouta in adequate security conditions and carry out their delivery of aid, and that medical evacuations be allowed. For that to happen, the truce must be sustainable and flexible in order to take into account delays in the delivery, discharge and distribution of aid. Medical authorizations must not only be delivered in an expedited manner; they must also come with all the security guarantees needed by patients, their families and the humanitarian actors who assist them. Indeed, the protection due them under international humanitarian law must be unconditionally guaranteed.

The second element I would like to highlight is the departure of terrorist fighters from Ghouta as proposed by armed groups. In their letter to the Security Council, the three armed groups in eastern Ghouta, upon the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), indicated their commitment to upholding the resolution, made concrete proposals for a comprehensive cessation of hostilities and committed themselves to taking combatant members of their groups out of Ghouta. The United Nations offered its assistance in those exchanges and carried out important work along those lines, to which the Secretary General just referred. I call on Russia today to conclude and implement the relevant agreements without delay. This is one of the keys to implementing the resolution.

The third element is political negotiation. A lasting cessation of hostilities in Syria requires a political process consistent with the terms of resolution 2254 (2015), our shared road map for ending the conflict. Staffan de Mistura has our full support in bringing this mission to a successful conclusion and swiftly convening negotiations in Geneva, which is the only legitimate forum for a credible solution. In order to

achieve results, United Nations mediation requires that necessary pressure be exerted on the parties. We therefore call once again on Russia, as well as Iran, to fulfil their responsibilities, as we are fulfilling our own.

Collectively we have the capacity, if we so wish, to stop the endless descent into the abyss that characterizes the Syrian tragedy, and finally create a real political dynamic. On behalf of France, I therefore call once again for all members of the Council to finally rally their words and action in the service of this shared objective, which matches to our interests and responsibilities. It is never too late to save lives, and it is our responsibility — if we accept it — to end the tragedy of Syria, on which our generation, and the credibility of the Security Council, will be judged.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and his detailed information on what we asked for. We particularly appreciated his words when he said that there should be only one agenda for all of us — ending this crisis.

Russia supported the Security Council's adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), guided by the priority of improving the humanitarian situation in various parts of Syria. We not only believe that its effective implementation is extremely important, we have also proposed concrete ways of achieving that, something that was discussed in today's briefing. And that is unlike various capitals whose representatives have settled comfortably for doing nothing while vilifying the Syrian regime, as they call it, and making endless accusations about Russia. In out last meeting on the subject (see S/PV.8188), I promised to count the number of times that Ambassador Haley mentioned Russia in the next meeting. The answer is 22. France came second, with 16 mentions, and the United Kingdom was third, with 12. This matters not just for the record but for the context in which it occurs. What is going on is a political policy, and it does not have to do merely — indeed, not much at all — with concern for Syrians' humanitarian needs.

It is important that everyone understands that resolution 2401 (2018) is not about an immediate ceasefire, which is a utopian notion, but a preliminary agreement between the parties as a condition for achieving sustainable de-escalation in all the contested areas of Syria, not just eastern Ghouta. That is the only realistic way. The resolution contains an unequivocal demand in that regard, and we are trying to make that happen. The Council has heard about that today and will hear more.

The authorities in Damascus have expressed their satisfaction with the resolution and their willingness to implement its provisions. However, they have also rightly demanded an immediate cessation of attacks on the capital and of all infringements on Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The counter-terrorist operation that the Syrian armed forces are conducting does not contradict resolution 2401 (2018). The Government of Syria has every right to work to end threats to its citizens' security. The Damascus suburbs cannot continue to be a breeding ground for terrorists. It is the terrorists' persistent attempts to disrupt the ceasefire that serve to maintain the tensions in Syria, and of course the most problematic area is in eastern Ghouta.

The July 2017 Cairo agreements on the eastern Ghouta de-escalation zone gave the militants a chance to be included in the political settlement. They did not take advantage of it and have still not dissociated themselves from the terrorists. Even now the groups' activities are coordinated from the joint headquarters run by Jabhat Al-Nusra. We have reliable information that they are in active radio contact, discussing plans for shelling the humanitarian corridors, among other things. Why are they only now talking about being willing to drive Al-Nusra's members out of eastern Ghouta? And why are we the only ones asking that question? We have answered it a number of times ourselves when we have spoken about suspicions that Al-Nusra is being preserved for particular political purposes, in this case to maintain a dangerous hotbed of armed resistance in the immediate vicinity of Syria's capital.

Even now they continue to lull us with fairy stories about how few terrorists there are in eastern Ghouta. And who is going to monitor the armed groups' implementation of the resolution? Who will be responsible for that? Just please do not keep saying the so-called regime, and Russia, and Iran. Such ideological attitudes are simply not serious in the context of the professional discussions that we conduct in the Security Council. What responsibility will the members of the Council take for the implementation of the resolution? How will they implement it? How will they influence the militias they support?

Following the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), with Russia's participation, daily five-hour humanitarian pauses were established and the Muhayam-Al-Wafedin checkpoint was opened for use by both civilians and militants with families. They were guaranteed security, transportation and protection along the entire route. The Syrian authorities then opened another checkpoint, Jisreen-Mleha, in the southern area of eastern Ghouta. Medical posts have been set up, distribution points organized for hot meals, buses are standing by. However, the insurgents continued to subject the central areas of Damascus and its outskirts to massive shelling. Dozens of mines have been laid for days, resulting in deaths and injuries as well as major damage. Since the day the resolution was adopted more than 100 people have died, and many more been injured, as a result of the shelling in the capital. The Tishrin and Al-Biruni hospitals and a medical centre in Al-Rihan have been hit more than once. These are real hospitals, not the militants' field offices that are frequently disguised as hospitals. They are making active use of snipers. We know this for a fact.

It is a tragedy when any civilians die during an armed conflict. But my delegation has always been interested in the origin of the statistical information being used in the United Nations. In a highly politicized situation this subject is extremely important. Frequent assessments are pronounced about civilian losses in eastern Ghouta. We hope that future reports will be required to indicate where their data is from, how reliable it is and who exactly is meant by "reliable sources on the ground".

Every day that has passed, the extremists have forbidden civilians to leave the areas they have blocked and have severely suppressed attempts to resist arbitrary action, including through exemplary executions. We have reliable information about that too. Strikes on corridors and exit checkpoints are constant, including during the humanitarian pauses. On 9 March a convoy of refugees was shelled, once again disrupting an evacuation. Tunnels are being used for attacks on the Syrian army, and the exits from underground installations are located in neighbourhoods where there are public institutions, mainly mosques, hospitals and markets. They have inflated food prices and at the same time have been taking away the people's food, water, medicines and mobile phones. They are setting up firing positions in residential buildings and using people as human shields. They are laying mines in neighbourhoods that are adjacent to the line of contact. They are conducting searches and confiscating permit papers distributed by Government forces.

The residents are trying to resist this repression, organizing spontaneous rallies and clashing with the militias. On 1 March, in north-eastern Douma, Al-Nusra terrorists shot four people who participated in such a demonstration. Today there was a major protest in Kafr Batna. The first major exodus of civilians took place on the night of 11 March, when 52 people, 26 of them children, left the village of Misraba with the assistance of the Russian Centre for the Reconciliation of Opposing Sides and the Syrian army.

There are also militants who want to leave eastern Ghouta, but their field commanders threaten potential defectors with reprisals. For the first time, on 9 March, after long and tense negotiations, with the participation of officers from the Russian Centre for Reconciliation, 13 militants were evacuated from the enclave through the humanitarian corridor at their own request. Talks have been held with Jaysh Al-Islam on reaching an agreement on the withdrawal of a second group of fighters. A meeting was also held with the leaders of Faylaq Al-Rahman, at which it was demanded that they dissociate themselves from Jabhat Al-Nusra immediately. However, according to information received, the militants of the group decided to continue their armed resistance, forcibly recruiting ordinary citizens into their ranks.

To turn to the subject of the humanitarian convoy entering Douma on 5 March, the convoy received comprehensive support from the Syrian Government and the Russian military. A humanitarian corridor was established, security ensured for its passage and the situation was monitored. However, there was a great deal of evidence of disorganized activity on the part of the humanitarian actors. According to our information, United Nations staff needlessly delayed the convoy operations, creating real security risks. While the convoy was being put together, they attempted to load it with undeclared medical supplies — and the fact that not all of them were declared was mentioned today — and wasted around two hours in a meeting with the leaders of the so-called local councils. They spread unreliable information about aerial strikes in the trucks' unloading area, and today some delegations seized on that joyfully, although what actually occurred was one instance of mortar fire from the armed groups' positions. They did not respond to local residents'

request to help them leave the enclave. Nonetheless, 13 people, five of them children, were evacuated.

Afterwards, it was curious to read a report that one of Ahrar Al-Sham's field commanders had, in a tone of irony, expressed his appreciation for the humanitarian pause on 5 March, which enabled the militias to regroup, recover their strength and a number of lost positions and prepare ambushes for the Syrian military.

A 9 March action was successfully carried out with the Russian military providing a truck convoy with safe conduct.

However, the scope of resolution 2401 (2018) is not limited to eastern Ghouta. We should note that in the past two weeks, the terrorists of Al-Nusra and associated militia groups have repeatedly shelled villages in Hamah province. As a result of new strikes there are been deaths and injuries in blockaded Fo'ah and Kafraya in Idlib. Armed clashes between illegal groups in that province have led to threats of a number of medical facilities being closed. Al-Nusra has become more active in the southern de-escalation zone, which could be related to the fact that they continue to be supplied with weapons from outside. The situation in Afrin remains very difficult.

The Syrian authorities have given permission for humanitarian aid to be delivered to the residents of Rukban camp, in the area illegally held by the Americans around the Al-Tanf military base. We would like to know what the United Nations is doing about that. Needless to say, we assume that the distribution of humanitarian assistance will be undertaken by a trustworthy entity such as the International Committee of the Red Cross or the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. We are also awaiting the speedy dispatch of a United Nations humanitarian needs assessment mission to Raqqa, which was bombed out by the coalition. There should be no pointless delays with this, so I would like to ask the United Nations when that mission will take place.

We understand very well the unspoken motives for the current disinformation campaign, whose aim is to create a public perception that the Syrian authorities use toxic substances. In fact, both we and the Syrians have well-founded fears that provocations are being planned with the aim of accusing the Syrian authorities of carrying out chemical attacks. According to information received, Al-Nusra used a chlorine-based substance in eastern Ghouta on 5 March, affecting more than 30 local residents. This is all being done in order to prepare the ground for unilateral acts of force against sovereign Syria. We heard hints of that in the statements made by some delegations today. Essentially, steps are being considered that could deliver yet another heavy blow to regional stability. Meanwhile, on territory formerly controlled by illegal armed groups, there have been more new discoveries of stores of chemicals, but the relevant bodies of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons have been very slow to react to the appeals of the Syrian authorities.

Russia will continue its efforts to implement resolution 2401 (2018), but we demand that some of our colleagues do their part and exert genuine pressure on the groups that they support or sponsor, instead of constantly calling on Russia and creating the false impression that the resolution applies only to us.

In conclusion, I would like to say that this afternoon four Security Council will be holding an unofficial Arria Formula meeting with the declared intention of making opposition voices heard on the humanitarian issue in Syria. This is going to be widely covered in the media. First and foremost, we want to point out the fact that is unacceptable to use United Nations resources for politicized purposes, and that is certainly not what Arria Formula meetings were conceived for. This event conceals the desire of its organizers to exert informational pressure on the Syrian Government and those who are helping it fight terrorism. In our view, to get the full picture, it would not be a bad idea to listen to the residents of Raqqa and Rukban camp, not to mention eastern Ghouta, where there are quite a few people who would be glad of the opportunity to appeal for their deliverance from the presence of extremists.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I should like at the outset to thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his briefing. China appreciates the positive efforts made by the United Nations and the Secretary-General to alleviate the humanitarian situation in the Syrian regions affected. China sympathizes with the suffering of the Syrian people and has consistently been working hard to help them. Last month we channelled assistance through the International Committee of the Red Cross, sending water, food, medical services and shelter to internally displaced persons in Syria.

We are extremely concerned at the fact that the people of Syria are suffering from the conflict. No act

of violence against innocent civilians can be tolerated. This situation must end.

On 24 February, the members of the Security Council, leaving aside their differences, unanimously adopted resolution 2401 (2018). This upheld the unity of the Council and provided a rare opportunity for a ceasefire, halting the violence and easing the suffering of the Syrian people. After the resolution was adopted, we saw that United Nations humanitarian relief convoys had overcome difficulties of all kinds and entered eastern Ghouta, delivering much-needed assistance to the people there.

With Russia announcing the implementation of the temporary ceasefire, a humanitarian corridor was opened for the Syrian people. We saw that some civilians, including children, had already entered the safe area through the humanitarian corridor and received relief and assistance. It has also come to our attention that the parties to the conflict continue to attack each other and that owing to the shelling the humanitarian corridor has not been able to serve its full purpose. We urge all parties concerned to make joint efforts, exert their influence and ensure that resolution 2401 (2018) is effectively and earnestly implemented. All members of the Security Council should maintain their unity and jointly stay on track to find a political solution to the Syrian issue, support the early resumption of the Geneva peace talks and urge all parties in Syria to achieve a solution acceptable to all as soon as possible, through a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process, in order to ease the suffering of the Syrian people. China will continue to make unremitting efforts to that end.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): I join others in thanking Secretary-General António Guterres for his briefing.

We welcome the efforts of the United Nations, its system and the International Committee of the Red Cross to render immediate life-saving services, conduct hundreds of medical evacuations and send convoys to the besieged and hard-to-reach areas, especially eastern Ghouta, despite the potential danger to the lives of their personnel. We therefore urge the members of the Security Council to assist the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in operationalizing those emergency programmes and to ensure the protection of medical and humanitarian workers. Likewise, we also urge the parties to support United Nations structures in fulfilling their mandates.

We echo the United Nations calls to all parties to facilitate unconditional, unimpeded and sustained access to all people in need throughout the country and to take the necessary measures to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, including schools and medical facilities, as required by international law and human rights standards.

Kazakhstan considers that it is equally important to further promote the Syrian settlement and believes that the Astana process has great potential for guiding intra-Syrian talks towards long-term peace. In that context, we propose that all sides, including stakeholders, provide all-round assistance, making use of the positive developments to improve the humanitarian situation on the ground.

Astana continues to support resolution 2254 (2015), as it always has, and repeatedly calls on the International Syria Support Group and other countries to help the conflicting parties to implement the measures stipulated in the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and the Vienna statements.

We express concern over the existing difficulties in Syria, which seriously impede the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018), and we call on the international community to influence the conflicting parties to cooperate with the United Nations. The only way to truly resolve the crisis is through negotiations, predicated on mutual trust and understanding, together with confidence-building measures.

In practical terms, we are convinced that expelling terrorist groups from eastern Ghouta may calm the situation in that sector. Let us be frank: removing the Al-Nusra Front and other affiliated terrorist groups from the area, as stated in a letter from three parties, must be pursued in order to end hostilities. The implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) is a collective responsibility, with each Council member playing a significant role.

Finally, Kazakhstan supports solutions in Syria on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué, as well as the agreements on the de-escalation zones reached during the Astana process.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this meeting and to welcome the presence of Secretary-General António Guterres, who reminded us of the responsibilities of the international community,

in particular the Council, given the serious and terrible developments in Syria.

Peru follows with great concern the humanitarian situation in that country. We must express our sorrow and solidarity to the victims of the conflict, most of whom are children. We deeply regret that, two weeks after the ceasefire was unanimously adopted by the Council through resolution 2401 (2018), there has not been sufficient progress in its implementation. As the Secretary-General noted, a sustained cessation of hostilities has not materialized. The conflict continues to claim civilian victims. The much-needed humanitarian assistance has been provided in a very limited way. International law and international humanitarian law continue to be violated with impunity.

The bleak outlook requires us to redouble our efforts. The Security Council must remain united in its responsibility to protect the Syrian population by promoting all actions conducive to ensuring the full and immediate implementation of resolution 2401 (2018). The responsibility to act is clearly greater for the countries with the greatest capacity for influence in the field, in particular the guarantors of the de-escalation zones agreed in Astana.

The situation is particularly serious in eastern Ghouta, where, among other emergencies, more than 1,000 people need to be evacuated for medical reasons. It is also serious in Idlib, Afrin, Rukban and Raqqa, among other places. We need to remember that the ceasefire must cover the entire Syrian territory and allow humanitarian assistance in a sustained, safe and unhindered way.

The Syrian Government must comply with the ceasefire immediately and fulfil its responsibility to protect the population and its obligation to cooperate with the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018). The fight against terrorism cannot be used as an excuse to violate human rights and international humanitarian law.

Peru supports the proposal of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura to promote dialogue with the opposition groups that have expressed their willingness to comply with the ceasefire and to expel members of terrorist organizations linked to the Al-Nusra Front from eastern Ghouta.

Peru remains committed to achieving a political solution to the conflict that ends the ongoing humanitarian disaster, ensures accountability for the atrocious crimes committed in that country, including the use of chemical weapons, supports regional stability and achieves sustainable peace in Syria.

We would like to conclude by expressing our support for the Secretary-General in his call for the immediate implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) and for his tireless efforts and those of his team on the ground. We also wish to highlight the professionalism, the courage and the sense of duty of the United Nations humanitarian personnel and of the humanitarian agencies such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, among others deployed in Syria.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to express my gratitude to Secretary-General António Guterres for his informative briefing. I also thank him for his leadership and all his support, in particular his tremendous efforts, as well as those of his Special Envoy, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, and of the entire United Nations team, to achieve the full implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) and a definitive resolution of the Syrian conflict.

Today's meeting should be another milestone in the international response to the humanitarian crisis prevailing in Syria. However, unfortunately, that is not the case. As the Secretary-General underscored in his briefing, in recent weeks, the parties involved at all levels have intensified their fighting in eastern Ghouta despite the humanitarian ceasefire agreed through the unanimous adoption of resolution 2401 (2018) exactly 16 days ago.

Nevertheless, we welcome with satisfaction reports that the United Nations and Syrian Arab Red Crescent convoy was finally able to reach eastern Ghouta last Friday to complete the delivery of food that could not be unloaded on 5 March for security reasons. However, the delivery of all necessary humanitarian supplies, including the medical and health-care supplies that were seized in the first attempt by convoys to the besieged areas, continues to be urgent and must be carried out without delay.

We also welcome the news that the Secretary-General has just provided to us with regard to some improvements in the situation on the ground in eastern Ghouta. We hope that today's meeting will lead to greater improvement or a definitive resolution of the situation in that part of Syria.

We read the letter dated 9 March that the co-penholders — France, the United Kingdom and the United States — addressed to the Secretary-General and the Council. We have also read very carefully the many letters that the Syrian Government has addressed to the members of the Security Council through its Permanent Representative. Basically, we note in those letters the repeated mutual accusations that have been a characteristic of this long conflict since its beginning. We are talking about a 30-day ceasefire, and time is gradually running out. We have had enough of mutual recrimination. The only collective task that we should focus on is finding a coherent peace mechanism to stop this endless and heinous war.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea remains deeply concerned about the developments in the situation in Syria. We reiterate the urgent need for Council members who have influence over the national parties to the conflict to redouble their diplomatic initiatives with a view to reaching a common understanding on how to find a political solution to the tragic crisis in Syria, the effects of which are a threat to the region and the international community, in particular because of the humanitarian implications posed by the millions of Syrians who are currently being displaced within the country or seeking asylum and because of the security risks caused by the expansion of Da'esh, the Al-Nusra Front and other terrorist entities.

We also express our deep indignation at the continuing fighting in the province of Idlib, which, for seven consecutive days, has been subject to attacks and rocket fire from Islamic factions in areas of the cities of Kafraya and Fo'ah. Those events, like many others, demonstrate the need for a common front that will expel from Syria the Islamic State, Al-Qaida, the Al-Nusra Front and all other associated entities that threaten peace and security in the region.

In conclusion, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea calls on the guarantors of the Astana process — Russia, Iran and Turkey — to ensure that the rounds of negotiations to be held on 15 and 16 March — to which the Special Envoy of the United Nations for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, was invited — serve not only to plan future actions and strategies, but also to give genuine impetus to finding a solution to the Syrian crisis once and for all.

During my statement after the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), I said that we had partially spared ourselves from embarrassment (see S/PV.8188). However, since 16 days have passed since the adoption of the resolution without it being implemented, I think we remain completely shamed.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): Let me thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive, but again very worrying and alarming, update.

Like many around this table, we share a sense of urgency, especially following the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018). We also see how difficult it is to implement resolution 2401 (2018) on the ground. Small steps, such as sending an aid convoy to eastern Ghouta last Monday, are still mere drops in the ocean of people's needs. Even with a unanimously adopted resolution, we are still lacking any substantial change on the ground and the fighting is far from being over. We therefore call for the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018).

We understand that the solution is not entirely in our hands, but still we should try to do our utmost to find possible ways to ensure that the life-saving aid convoys might reach those in need and medical evacuations might begin. Unfortunately, the situation in eastern Ghouta, but also in Idlib and Aleppo provinces, does not allow the suffering of ordinary Syrians to be alleviated.

Let me once again stress our full support for the Secretary-General, as well as his Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, in finding a political solution to the Syrian crisis. A political solution to the conflict remains the only viable way to end the suffering of Syrian people.

Let me also underline that the role of the Security Council remains crucial, but it is up to the Syrian people to decide their own future.

We agree that fighting against terrorist groups designated as such by the Security Council is crucial, but, at the same time, such designations cannot justify the attacks on innocent civilians and civilian infrastructure, including health facilities. Those attacks must stop and parties to the conflict must strictly comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law. In that context, let me once again strongly underline that any response to violence should be proportionate.

We need full compliance with the ceasefire agreed in resolution 2401 (2018). The Russian proposal for a daily five-hour pause is simply not enough to allow humanitarian workers to deliver aid and to evacuate those who cannot be treated on the ground. The international community, and especially the Council,

bear a huge responsibility to protect civilians. Allow me to share a couple of concrete ideas, which I hope will be useful, on how to improve the situation on the ground.

As the Security Council, we should demand United Nations access in order to monitor designated de-escalation zones to ensure the well-being of civilians. All States Members of the United Nations should fully cooperate with the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism set up last year and facilitate its work. Parties engaged in the conflict must cease enabling the crimes on the ground and withhold all their support to armed groups that target civilians. Parties conducting air strikes against terrorist groups must ensure that all necessary precautionary measures are taken into consideration in order to avoid civilian casualties and that all military operations are fully consistent with international law. All potential violations, including possible war crimes, must be investigated, and the perpetrators must be held accountable.

In conclusion, let me underline that, from our perspective, we in New York sometimes lack feedback on our actions. With regard to actions taken at Headquarters, it is for the Syrian people themselves to tell us what would be the most effective way to support them.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks the Secretary-General for his briefing on the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018), on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

Two weeks after its unanimous adoption by members of the Security Council, resolution 2401 (2018), which had inspired a great deal of hope, has not been implemented as planned, much to our regret. The requirement of an immediate cessation of hostilities for a period of at least 30 days, provided for by resolution 2401 (2018), to enable the safe and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid and services and medical evacuation of the critically sick and wounded, in accordance with applicable international humanitarian law, has not yet gone into effect.

The humanitarian and security situation remains worrisome because it is impossible for humanitarian convoys that endure indiscriminate attacks and bombings perpetrated by various hostile groups to reach besieged areas. In addition, attacks are carried out against medical and humanitarian personnel and health-care infrastructure. According to the World Health Organization, such attacks are on the rise.

The deterioration of the humanitarian situation within Syria's borders due to increased fighting makes for dangerous living conditions for thousands of internally displaced persons and obliterates the hope of restoring security and dignity to millions of refugees in neighbouring countries living in extremely difficult conditions. Given the dire situation, Côte d'Ivoire hopes that the second international conference on supporting the future of Syria and the region, to be held in Brussels on 24 and 25 April at the initiative of the European Union, will result in pledges of increased humanitarian aid and development support.

In accordance with the provisions of resolution 2401 (2018), Côte d'Ivoire again calls for the immediate cessation of hostilities in order to enable the safe, sustained and unimpeded access of humanitarian convoys delivering basic necessities to hundreds of people in dire need in eastern Ghouta and other areas of the country. My delegation welcomes reports that, for a few days, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent was able once again to enter the city of Douma in eastern Ghouta to deliver the aid necessary, including food and non-food items. My delegation encourages all Syrian stakeholders to create conditions that would allow the United Nations to make scheduled deliveries in eastern Ghouta, throughout the entire country and on Syrian borders.

Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its belief that the humanitarian situation will not improve without significant progress on the political landscape because the two issues are inextricably linked. Therefore, it invites hostile groups and all stakeholders to engage in political dialogue in order to achieve a peaceful solution to the crisis in Syria. In that regard, it welcomes the holding of a meeting in Geneva between the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. De Mistura, and the three Astana guarantors — Iran, the Russian Federation and Turkey — with a view to relaunching the Syrian political process.

The delegation of Côte d'Ivoire hopes that the next meeting to be held in Astana, at the initiative of the three guarantors of the Astana process, will enable us to reach a lasting ceasefire in Syria and to calmly resume the intra-Syrian peace talks pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. Llorentty Soliz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation would like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing on the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018).

Once again we take this opportunity to pay tribute to humanitarian workers who risk their lives daily as they carry out their duties. We join other colleagues in congratulating the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, on his efforts to find a political solution to the serious situation in Syria, which, as the Secretary-General recalled, is in its eighth year.

Bolivia deplores the challenges to the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) that the Secretary-General outlined in his briefing today. We condemn all deliberate attacks on civilians and demand respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We call on the parties involved to focus primarily on protecting hospitals, medical facilities, schools and civilian residences, and the personnel of the various agencies and humanitarian assistance organizations whose employees put their own lives at risk as they carry out their work on the ground. We call on the parties to cooperate and enhance coordination efforts with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, provide unhindered humanitarian access and allow urgent medical evacuations to be carried out, in particular in besieged and hard-to-reach areas.

We call upon the parties to work together to achieve the full implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) throughout Syria as soon as possible and in accordance with agreements reached in the Astana process and on the de-escalation zones. We underscore the importance of unity within the Security Council when implementing resolution 2401 (2018). Such unity must be present if our goal is to fully implement it. We also call on the members of the Council and all parties involved to depoliticize the humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic and ensure that its actions are in line with international law.

We highlight a few forums for dialogue that could assist with reaching consensus on a definitive cessation of hostilities, such as the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi, whose outcome is geared towards strengthening the political process in Geneva. We hope that that forum will allow for the full implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) as soon as possible.

In conclusion, we reiterate that there is no military solution to the crisis. The only solution is through an inclusive political dialogue ordered and led by and for the Syrian people. We extend our best hopes for the outcome of the next meeting to be held in Astana.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): We thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive, up-to-date and very useful briefing on the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018).

Two weeks after the adoption of that resolution, the humanitarian situation in Syria continues to cause serious concern. The United Nations and its humanitarian partners have failed to ensure safe, sufficient, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access for populations in need of life-saving assistance due ongoing fighting, in particular in eastern Ghouta. Nonetheless, we are mindful of the fact that resolution 2401 (2018) applies to all parts of Syria. We note that the Secretary-General did not overlook that aspect of the resolution in his briefing.

We had all emphasized the importance of the effective implementation of the resolution in order to make positive changes on the ground and alleviate the humanitarian tragedy in Syria. Given the increasingly complex situation on the ground, we knew that it would not be an easy task. After the Council adopted resolution 2401 (2018), we recognized that the United Nations and its humanitarian partners could deliver aid to eastern Ghouta and other affected areas. No doubt, there remain serious challenges to ensuring the full implementation of the resolution.

Although it demands the cessation of hostilities without delay for at least 30 consecutive days throughout Syria, with the immediate engagement of all parties to ensure safe, unimpeded and sustained delivery of humanitarian aid and medical evacuations, there have been ongoing military activities resulting in civilian casualties and the destruction of civilian facilities. Here, one should also not overlook the damage being caused by the shelling of Damascus.

Therefore, it is clear that much more remains to be done and all parties should be committed to the full implementation of the resolution. As the United Nations and its humanitarian partners are ready to deliver more aid to all Syrians throughout the country, it is absolutely critical that all the parties provide them safe, unfettered and sustained humanitarian access. In that regard, all those who have influence over the parties

should exert the necessary pressure to contribute to saving lives. It is also imperative to use all existing arrangements to facilitate the implementation of the resolution, particularly the cessation of hostilities. In that connection, we look forward to the Astana meeting, scheduled to take place on 15 and 16 March, which we hope will contribute to the full implementation of the resolution.

Finally, as the Secretary-General stated, we are entering into the eighth year since the start of the Syrian crisis. While we look forward to seeing the Syrian people, as a sovereign State, find a comprehensive political solution based on resolution 2254 (2015), the Council also has a responsibility and an indispensable role in resolving the Syrian crisis. Therefore, we hope that the spirit of cooperation and consensus that the Council demonstrated during the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018) will be sustained not only to respond to the humanitarian tragedy, but also to ensure progress in the political track with a view to finding a lasting solution to the crisis. Most importantly, the cooperation of relevant countries that have influence is key. Without those countries, there will be no solution in sight.

The President: I will now make a statement in my capacity as representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

I would like to thank Secretary-General Guterres for his briefing. Through him, I would also like to thank all United Nations and other humanitarian personnel on the ground. They work under extreme circumstances.

Sixteen days ago (see S/PV.8188), the Security Council showed a rare example of unity regarding Syria when it adopted resolution 2401 (2018). I recall the glimmer of hope that day in the Chamber. All of us agreed that all parties to the Syrian conflict must cease hostilities in order to enable the delivery of humanitarian assistance and the evacuation of the critically sick and wounded. Yet one day after the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), the Syrian regime, supported by Russia and Iran, launched a most violent ground offensive to conquer the enclave of eastern Ghouta. That offensive came on top of a relentless air campaign that had started one month ago. Resolution 2401 (2018) calls for a cessation of hostilities, without delay. Unfortunately, it is the military offensive that continues without delay.

Elsewhere in Syria, including in Idlib and Afrin, violence continues to threaten the civilian population as well. The Council must do everything in its power to advance the full implementation of resolution 2401 (2018). In that regard, I would like to stress the importance of humanitarian aid, the monitoring of the cessation of hostilities and accountability.

With regard to my first point, the immediate delivery of humanitarian aid, last week we were deeply shocked to hear reports that medical supplies, including surgical supplies, insulin and even trauma kits, had been removed from convoys by the Syrian regime. Medical supplies save lives and provide relief to the inhumane suffering that too many Syrians are going through. Medical supplies cannot be used as weapons by terrorists. There is no justification for denying medicine and medical supplies to the wounded and sick.

The first humanitarian convoy that received authorization from the Syrian regime to deliver aid to eastern Ghouta was not able to fully unload because of resumed fighting. The convoy that arrived last Friday was finally able to deliver aid, including medical supplies, for 27,500 people. However, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is still waiting for authorization to complete the delivery to Douma for all 70,000 people, as initially approved by the Syrian authorities. We call on all parties to immediately allow sustained and unimpeded access to deliver supplies to people in desperate need of humanitarian assistance. That applies to eastern Ghouta and to all in need throughout the country.

On my second point, the cessation of hostilities and the need for monitoring, resolution 2401 (2018) calls for an immediate nationwide cessation of hostilities. A strong monitoring mechanism is needed urgently in order to ensure implementation. We agree with the French proposal in that regard. Since the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), air strikes have continued, even increased, especially on eastern Ghouta.

We hear the Russian Federation say that those strikes are targeted at terrorists. However, we underline once more that the exemption to the ceasefire for attacks directed at United Nations-listed terrorist groups does not provide an excuse to ignore the basic principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. According to the latest report of the Commission of Inquiry, the siege of eastern Ghouta continues to be characterized by the use of prohibited weapons and attacks against civilian and protected objects, which we condemn in the strongest terms.

We also condemn the shelling of Damascus from eastern Ghouta. We call upon all parties to abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law at all times. Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura should facilitate negotiations between armed opposition groups, the Syrian regime and Russia in order to advance the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018).

One concrete and helpful step is to evacuate United Nations-listed terrorist groups from eastern Ghouta. A first evacuation of 13 imprisoned terrorist fighters reportedly took place last Friday. It is crucial that any evacuation of armed fighters take place in a safe and orderly fashion. We call on the United Nations to prepare for putting in place the necessary monitoring mechanisms in that regard. We call on Russia to accept the offer of the Special Envoy to facilitate further evacuation of United Nations-listed terrorist groups from eastern Ghouta. Civilians should never be forced to leave against their will. Forced displacement may constitute a war crime.

On my third point, the credibility and accountability of the Council, despite the unanimous adoption of resolution 2401 (2018) we have seen no cessation of hostilities. We have seen no significant improvement in the humanitarian situation on the ground in Syria. This also has a negative impact on the credibility of the Council. It is vital for the functioning of the rules-based international order that decisions of the Council be respected and implemented. As a Council, we have a collective responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. However, we should not forget that the responsibility and, indeed, the obligation to execute its decisions lies with individual Member States.

The human suffering in Syria, especially in eastern Ghouta, must end now. We need a full cessation of hostilities in all of Syria, including eastern Ghouta, Idlib and Afrin. And we call on the Russian Federation in particular to use its influence and to do its utmost to achieve that, thereby also upholding the Council's credibility.

In conclusion, the siege of eastern Ghouta is entering its fifth year. The war in Syria will enter its eighth year later this week, on 15 March, as others have noted. One wonders how the Syrian regime thinks to ever achieve the legitimacy to govern the people it now pounds into submission or death.

As the High Commissioner for Human Rights stated during the thirty-seventh session of the Human Rights Council, "what we are seeing in eastern Ghouta are likely war crimes and potentially crimes against humanity". The perpetrators of these crimes must know they are being identified, that dossiers are being built up with a view to their prosecution, and that they will be held accountable for what they have done.

We thank the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic for its important work to date. We recall the resolution of the Human Rights Council of 5 March, which calls on the Commission to investigate the situation in eastern Ghouta. We call on all Council members to support the referral of the humanitarian catastrophe in Syria to the International Criminal Court. We also urge all States to increase their support for the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic.

For now, however, our common efforts should be directed at securing immediate relief for those millions in Syria in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. For that, we need the cessation of hostilities to be implemented immediately and in a sustained manner. We need a continuous pause in the fighting of 30 days, as demanded by resolution 2401 (2018). If its implementation continues to fail, that will require a response from the Council that goes beyond where we stand now.

We thank the Secretary-General for his perseverance and endless efforts to uphold the norms and values of the Charter of the United Nations, international human rights law and international humanitarian law, as well as to promote compliance with resolution 2401 (2018). We call on all Council members to follow his example.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I wish to again remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I will not begin by commenting on the procedural point that you have raised, Mr. President, but rather I will focus on the essential issues that

are supposed to be of interest to the members of the Security Council.

I welcome the Secretary-General and note the statement at the outset of his briefing that the Secretariat does not have all the necessary information to carefully access the situation on the ground because the United Nations does not have a presence in all areas. The Secretariat humbly and politely said those words, noting that it does not have full, relevant information pertaining to the Syrian situation, although the United Nations has a branch of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Damascus and there are dozens of United Nations agencies operating in Syria, in addition to 13 international non-governmental organizations also operating there.

However, some of our colleagues in the Security Council, who have shut down their embassies in Damascus and are now completely disconnected from credible information, instead rely on information from what is known as open sources. They have provided a vast amount of information that would never serve the interests of the Syrian people or of those present in such an important and significant discussion. That information is misleading and could poison the atmosphere and fuel sedition regarding the role of the Security Council, which is mandated to maintain international peace and security.

The Syrian Government stands ready to engage seriously with positive international initiatives that serve the interests of the Syrian people, especially in ending the bloodshed throughout Syria, as stated in resolution 2401 (2018). My country has expressed its satisfaction with resolution 2401 (2018), particularly the positive provisions contained therein. In that regard, my country confirms that it has taken all the following procedures to relieve the suffering of our people in eastern Ghouta.

First, immediately after the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), hostilities were ceased on a daily basis from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m. Damascus local time, and remain so to this very moment, with the aim of delivering humanitarian aid and ensuring the unimpeded and safe exit of civilians from the areas controlled by terrorist groups. Secondly, two safe humanitarian corridors have been opened for civilians wishing to exit the area. Thirdly, two joint United Nations-International Committee of the Red Cross convoys, in collaboration with the Syrian Red Crescent, were sent to eastern Ghouta on 5 and 9 March.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, all those procedures have been countered by the terror of armed organizations present in Ghouta. Incited by their masters — some of them, unfortunately, members of the Security Council — these organizations have targeted civilians in Damascus since the beginning of the year, firing more than 2,499 missiles and mortars that have claimed the lives of 70 civilian martyrs and injured 556 people. Those organizations have prevented our people in eastern Ghouta from leaving in order to continue to use them as human shields and material for humanitarian and media blackmail. They have even targeted those who managed to escape towards the two corridors by firing bullets and missiles.

The latest incident in Syria occurred on 8 March, when the so-called Faylaq Al-Rahman — one of the terrorist arms of the petty State of Qatar in Syria — targeted a civilian convoy heading towards one of the corridors, leading to high casualties among civilians. By the way, that terrorist organization, Faylaq Al-Rahman, has been hailed by some of those present because of its readiness to implement resolution 2401 (2018). They presented it as a part of the moderate Syrian opposition, and distributed a letter signed by that and other terrorist organizations, addressed to the Secretary-General. That is the modus operandi of the Security Council with terrorist groups.

The procedures taken by the Syrian Government are not limited to eastern Ghouta. Over the past few days, the Government has undertaken a number of other procedures. First, we have requested that the United Nations and a number of humanitarian organizations immediately send a mission to investigate the humanitarian situation in Raqqa, which was destroyed by the International Coalition led by the United States of America. Secondly, we have requested approval to send humanitarian convoys to the Rukban camp, provided that the aid is delivered and distributed by the Syrian Red Crescent and the Red Cross exclusively, and not by the United States occupation authorities or the terrorist groups in Rukban camp and Tanaf area. Thirdly, two days ago the Syrian Red Crescent obtained Government approval to send convoys to Ghouta, Raqqa, Afrin and Rukban. To date, it has not sent the convoys to Rukban and Afrin because the United Nations failed to ensure the necessary safeguards from the United States and Turkish occupation forces. That is the reason.

With every advance by the Syrian Army against terrorist groups in any given area, the States sponsoring terrorism launch heated disinformation campaigns to distract the world from the terrorism, aggression and occupation against Syria. The inference is that those countries have never been keen to protec the lives of civilians, but prefer to protect their investments in terrorism after they have spent billions of dollars on it, as was said by the previous Prime Minister of Qatar, in order to recycle terrorism elsewhere in Syria.

The behaviour that I have mentioned is not limited to State-sponsored terrorism, unfortunately. It has even been demonstrated by some senior officials of the Secretariat. We had hoped that the Secretariat, especially in the light of the second preambular paragraph of resolution 2401 (2018), would provide an unequivocal legal description of the crimes committed by the so-called International Coalition led by the United States against our Syrian people in Raqqa and other places, and the procedures to ensure the end of that aggression. We had also hoped that the Secretariat would provide us with an unequivocal legal description of the acts of invasion by Turkish forces of a precious part of our national territory, especially against our civilian people in Afrin, and the procedures to ensure the end of the Turkish aggression. We had also hoped for an unequivocal legal description of the presence of the United States forces on Syrian territory without the approval of the Syrian Government and the procedures to ensure the end of that occupation.

The government of my country affirms its right to defend its citizens and combat terrorism in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions, especially the second preambular paragraph of resolution 2401 (2018); fight all those who practice, fund and support terrorism; work towards restoring security stability and peace; and rebuild all that has been destroyed by terrorists and their masters.

Finally, I have listened to my colleague the representative of the United States, who levels charges again and again against my country before all who are present and says that her country will take military actions against my country outside the legitimacy of the Council if chemical substances are used, just as its administration in Washington, D.C., did when it bombarded Al-Shayrat air base in my country last year. These irresponsible and provocative statements, which run counter to the Charter of the United Nations, are direct incitement to terrorist groups to use chemical weapons and fabricate anew all the evidence needed to accuse the Syrian Army, as they have done in previous times. I remind the representative of the United States that the former Joint Investigative Mechanism refused to take samples from Al-Shayrat air base because if it had done so it would have been categorically proved that the Syrian Government is not responsible for the incident in Khan Shaykhun. In fact, what the United States perpetrated against that Syrian air base was a full-fledged aggression.

I call on the representatives of the United States, the United Kingdom and France to put an end to their violations of Security Council resolutions related to fighting terrorism, and on their Governments to stop supporting the terrorist groups in my country and cease providing them with a political umbrella to pursue their crimes against the Syrian people. It is high time that the United States Administration learn from its mistakes and stop repeating them. Is it not enough what they have done in Viet Nam, Iraq, Libya, Somalia and Yemen, invoking very cheap lies that have already been condemned and denounced by international public opinion? In this regard, I recall the words of Naguib Mahfouz, the Nobel laureate:

> "They are liars, they know they are liars, and they know that we know that they are liars. However, they still lie, and very loudly so."

In conclusion, the Russian Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic issued a statement a few minutes ago that street battles have begun in Ghouta, following the demands for the separation of the aforementioned Faylaq Al-Rahman and Jabhat Al-Nusra. This current street fighting impedes the evacuation of civilians who are forced to find safe haven underground in Ghouta.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8202

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8202nd meeting
Wednesday, 14 March 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Van Oosterom	(Netherlands)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Temenov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Ms. French

Agenda

Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan

Report of the Secretary-General on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (S/2018/154)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan

Report of the Secretary-General on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (S/2018/154)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Sudan to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Jeremiah Kingsley Mamabolo, Joint Special Representative for Darfur and Head of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. Mamabolo is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from El Fasher.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/154, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear briefings by Mr. Mamabolo and Ambassador Joanna Wronecka, Permanent Representative of Poland, in her capacity as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1591 (2005), concerning the Sudan.

Recalling the Security Council's latest note 507 on its working methods (S/2017/507), I wish to encourage all participants, both members and non-members of the Council, to deliver their statements in five minutes or less. Note 507 also encourages briefers to be succinct and to focus on key issues. Briefers are further encouraged to limit initial remarks to 15 minutes or less.

I now give the floor to Mr. Mamabolo.

Mr. Mamabolo: I am honoured to once again have an opportunity to update the Security Council on the situation in Darfur and on issues concerning the implementation of the mandate of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). It is particularly important that we review the progress made so far following the first phase of the reconfiguration, in particular in the light of the forthcoming strategic review of the mission in April.

The report of the Secretary General on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (S/2018/154) covers the period from 16 December 2017 to 15 February 2018, during which UNAMID started phase two of its reconfiguration.

Under the second phase, the Jebel Marra Task Force is being operationalized. To that end, since January, the Mission has embarked on the redeployment of military and police personnel, as well as civilian staff, in order to strengthen the operations of the Jebel Marra Task Force. In addition, the construction of the temporary operating base in Golo is under way. However, we continue to face challenges in accessing Golo through Kabkabiyah. One of our engineering contingents is providing assistance in improving the condition of the road. The mission force is currently organized in two sectors, namely, the Jebel Marra Task Force, with its headquarters in Zalingei, and the State Security Assistance Force, which covers areas outside the area of operation of the Task Force.

Furthermore, the reconfiguration in phase two also entails a further reduction in the number of military personnel to 8,735 and of police personnel to 2,500. We have also reduced the number of civilian by 422, and are expected to reduce it by approximately 158 more. The deployment of formed police units to team sites from which the military has withdrawn or rotated started at the beginning of this month. We expect that the formed police units will be fully operational at the Saraf Omra, Korma, El Sherif and Masteri team sites by 30 March.

It is too early to make a realistic assessment of the impact on the overall security and protection-of-civilians situation in areas from which UNAMID withdrew under phase one of the mission's reconfiguration plan. Although there are some administrative restrictions regarding access imposed by the Government, nevertheless the mission continues to engage with the Government to overcome those challenges and to do everything within its mandate to access and monitor the situation in those areas. We are in the process of finalizing an assessment of the impact caused by the closure of the various team sites to enable

us to determine the potential and actual impact of our disengagement in those areas.

Intra- and inter-communal clashes persist in some areas of Darfur, albeit at a relatively reduced scale. We have also experienced instability in some traditionally restive camps for internally displaced persons (IDP), such as Korma, Hassa Hissa and Hamadiya. Those clashes are mainly fuelled by traditional and long-standing unresolved socioeconomic and political issues that have been the root causes of Darfur's conflict landscape over the years. UNAMID has been intervening in a constructive way within the framework of the mission's protection-of-civilians strategy.

The stalemate in the Darfur peace process persists, despite our numerous efforts in support of President Mbeki in our collective efforts to persuade the parties to the conflict to sign cessation-of-hostilities agreements and commence direct negotiations. The framework for the negotiations continues to be the main issue of contention. I maintain contact with the Darfur armed movements, with the most recent meeting taking place on 1 March in Addis Ababa. We continue to urge them to accede to negotiations on the basis of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur. I therefore call upon Council members' respective countries to use their bilateral channels to exhort the parties to the Darfur conflict to sign cessation-of-hostilities agreements and resume negotiations, including to use leverage with Abdul Wahid to prevail upon him to acknowledge the futility of war and to join the peace process. That would be the only way whereby the people of Darfur, and indeed the international community, could have any realistic hope of achieving durable peace in Darfur.

The situation in Darfur now is not the same as it was in 2003. Except for the sporadic clashes between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid in the Jebel Marra area, there is general absence of war in Darfur. I believe that the adjustment of UNAMID's mandate and posture over the years, from resolution 1769 (2007) to 2363 (2017), was a clear recognition of that evolving reality. The fundamental question is: What do we do with those conditions of relative peace and stability in Darfur? Over the past several months I have visited various parts of Darfur to get first-hand information on what the people of Darfur say and want. In a nutshell, they say there is relative peace and stability; they commend UNAMID for contributing to that state of affairs; and they acknowledge the positive impact of the civilian weapons-collection exercise initiated by the Government. Nevertheless, there have been some complaints from some members of the IDP communities relating to the perceived lack of fairness of the civilian weapons-collection exercise. That notwithstanding, IDPs do want to return to their areas of origin, but under conducive conditions. Most important, they want resources for post-conflict reconstruction and development.

Pursuant to resolution 2363 (2017), in collaboration with the United Nations country team, the mission continues to give priority to activities geared towards supporting the stabilization of the situation through economic, social and political initiatives and assistance designed to consolidate the prevailing relative peace and stability. Consultations with stakeholders are being undertaken on the conceptual framework and policy for implementing the stabilization mandate in Darfur. Despite the relative stability, concerns persist nonetheless that, owing to insecurity and land occupation issues, many IDPs are not able to return to their areas of origin. In that context, we have been engaging with stakeholders, including the Government of the Sudan, in search of durable solutions to the problems of IDPs.

Without question, a significant amount of resources is required for post-conflict reconstruction and the development of Darfur. I therefore appeal to all Council members to play their part, either through bilateral commitments of resources by their respective countries or through much-needed advocacy for early recovery and development in Darfur. As the mission engages in the stabilization phase, we are duty-bound to do it in a manner that consolidates, not compromises, the gains that our presence has achieved over the years. Such actions should include the injection of resources by the international community in order to assist with socioeconomic development and the establishment, as well as consolidation, of State authority throughout Darfur. In the same vein, I would urge the Council to ensure that adequate resources are mobilized and that they are commensurate with the pace of UNAMID's drawdown of its personnel to drive continued stability.

In conclusion, on behalf of UNAMID, let me express our gratitude to the Council for its important support. Especially as we embark on this critical stage of UNAMID's engagement in Darfur, we will need more, not less, of the Council's generous support.

The President: I thank Mr. Mamabolo for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ambassador Wronecka.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): In accordance with paragraph 3 (a) of resolution 1591 (2005), I have the honour to brief the Security Council on the work of the Sudan Sanctions Committee, covering the period from 8 December 2017 to 14 March 2018. I am pleased to deliver this first briefing as Chair of the Committee back to back with Mr. Mamabolo's briefing on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), which will help increase synergies between the Committee and UNAMID.

On 28 December 2017, under the stewardship of my predecessor, Ambassador Volodymyr Yelchenko of Ukraine, the Committee met to hear a presentation by the Panel of Experts on its final report (see S/2017/1125) and to discuss the Panel's recommendations. I will not repeat the findings of the final report, given that it was transmitted to the members of the Council immediately after the Committee's meeting. On the following day, the Committee issued a press release with a summary of the meeting.

Let me now turn to the three recommendations addressed to the Committee in the final report of the Panel of Experts.

In recommendation (a), the Panel of Experts proposed that the Committee continue to monitor the presence and activities of Darfuri rebels in Libya and South Sudan. As a follow-up to the recommendation, the Committee agreed to encourage the Panel of Experts to continue to cooperate with other relevant sanctions committees and their panels of experts. The Committee also agreed to consider organizing joint meetings with other committees as necessary.

With regard to recommendation (b), the Panel of Experts informed the Committee on 30 January that the proposed amendments to the sanctions list contained in the final report had inadvertently omitted identifier information and subsequently provided the Committee with revised proposed amendments. Such amendments to the list and the names of three individuals are currently under consideration by the Committee.

With regard to recommendation (c), on 30 January the Committee sent a letter to the Permanent Representative of the Sudan, encouraging the Government of the Sudan to instruct its border control agency to monitor the cross-border movement of the individuals listed. On 2 February the Committee held its fifth meeting with the Sudan and States of the region to discuss the implementation of the measures. The Sudan and eight States of the region — the Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Libya, South Sudan and Uganda — participated in the meeting. It focused on the final report of the Panel of Experts. Following a briefing by the Panel on its final report, the Sudan and States of the region shared their views on the findings of the Panel. The States invited also stressed their commitment to the implementation of the Council's resolutions. The Committee and the States invited agreed to build on the spirit of cooperation through constructive dialogue. A summary of the meeting was made available in a press release issued on 8 February.

During the Committee meeting on 2 February, I informed it of my intention to conduct a visit to the Sudan in April. I had discussed it informally with the Permanent Representative of the Sudan and received a positive response. That will be the third Chair's visit to the Sudan, following the first one in January 2014 and the second in May 2017. The draft terms of reference of the visit were approved by the Committee on 12 March. It will now await the consent of the Government of the Sudan.

On 22 February, the Committee received a letter from the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, proposing five individuals to serve on the newly extended Panel of Experts pursuant to resolution 2400 (2018), of 8 February 2018. The Committee had no objections to four of the candidates proposed, but the fifth candidate was placed on hold by three members of the Committee. On the same day, the Committee received from the Panel of Experts a draft implementation assistance notice on the requirements for end-user documentation under resolution 1945 (2010). The notice was prepared as a follow-up to recommendation (a) of the first report of the Panel of Experts. The proposed notice is now under consideration by the Committee.

The Committee received two quarterly updates from the Panel of Experts during the reporting period, on 6 February and 12 March, and an implementation report from a Member State. The Committee issued its annual report for 2017 as document S/2017/1081, which is available on the Committee's website.

The President: I thank Ms. Wronecka for her briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank you, Sir, for convening today's meeting. We also thank Ambassador Jeremiah Kingsley Mamabolo, Joint Special Representative for Darfur and Head of the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), and Ambassador Joanna Wronecka, Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1591 (2005), concerning the Sudan, for their briefings.

We take note of the report of the Secretary-General on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (S/2018/154) and the report of the Panel of Experts on the Sudan established pursuant to resolution 1591 (2005) (see S/2017/1081).

We believe the relative calm and stability in Darfur are encouraging. Nonetheless, we remain concerned about the humanitarian situation, which has led to more than 2.7 million displaced persons, and about the human rights situation, which primarily affects women and children. We welcome Pramila Patten's first visit to the Sudan as Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. We also commend the progress made in the implementation of the action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, signed in March 2016 by the Government of the Sudan, as well as the visit by Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. The Government of the Sudan should continue its efforts to protect its people from such dreadful crimes, allow victims access to justice and punish those responsible.

With regard to security, given the relative stability, we would like to welcome the decrease in the number of intercommunal clashes and the various reconciliation initiatives, as well as the establishment of a joint mechanism to regulate agriculture and prevent the theft of livestock. We also welcome the signing of the memorandum of understanding between UNAMID and the Government of the Sudan for the opening of a temporary base in Golo, the subsequent transfer of land, the visit of the Vice-President of the Sudan to Darfur and his commitment to carrying out development projects in the area. The Government of the Sudan and all Member States must collaborate more effectively with the Sanctions Committee through, among other things, ensuring adequate border control, preventing the supply of weapons and the funding of rebel groups, as well as submitting timely requests for exemptions.

Nonetheless, such measures must be complemented by other steps to address the root causes of the conflict if we truly desire lasting peace in Darfur. The vulnerabilities, weak institutions and poverty in Darfur must be addressed so as to prevent another outbreak of conflict. We believe that it is essential to implement the provisions governing land tenure, ensure food security and create decent employment opportunities for the population. We must resume the political process and encourage more women and young people to participate in it. It is vital to make headway in implementing the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur and broker an agreement on a permanent ceasefire.

In conclusion, we would like to underscore the efforts of UNAMID and the African Union High-level Implementation Panel in achieving those goals.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin my statement by paying well-deserved tribute to and thanking Mr. Jeremiah Kingsley Mamabolo, Joint Special Representative for Darfur and Head of the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), for his excellent briefing on the bimonthly report the Secretary-General on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (S/2018/154) and his tremendous efforts at the helm of this important mission. We also congratulate and thank Ambassador Joanna Wronecka of Poland for her substantive and insightful briefing as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1591 (2005), concerning the Sudan.

Based on the briefings we have just heard, there has been a marked improvement in the overall security situation in Darfur with very few, if any, clashes reported between the Government and armed groups in Darfur during the dry season, which is encouraging and highlighted in the Secretary-General's report. The Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea commends the Sudanese Government for creating an environment and conditions conducive to ensuring lasting improvement in Darfur, and urges it to continue working towards that end. We fully support it in its search for a definitive solution that will bring irreversible peace to Darfur.

In order to achieve that objective, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea believes that in the current phase, both the United Nations and the international

community must enhance their support for the Sudanese Government and UNAMID so that they may in turn address the root causes of the crisis which, at times, can spark isolated clashes that could potentially escalate. That is the case of intercommunal attacks, which require mediation and reconciliation efforts to prevent and put an end to such conflicts.

Additionally, there is an urgent need to support the Sudanese Government in its weapons-collection programme. The full implementation of that programme is critical not only to maintaining the current peace in Darfur, but also to restoring definitive peace to the region, especially since that critical programme is being carried out in the Jebel Marra zone, controlled by the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid.

While the Republic of Equatorial Guinea commends the Sudanese Government for these actions, it also urges the Government to closely monitor the activities of the Rapid Support Force during the weapons-collection operation. It must urge the Forces to abstain from interfering with internally displaced persons, especially in Central Darfur, so as to prevent a resurgence of tension in the zone.

Parallel to the security situation in Darfur which, according to the report presented today by Mr. Mamabolo, has been constantly improving, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea would like to see similar improvements at the political level, accompanied by significant progress in the political process and the implementation of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur to secure a total ceasefire. In that regard, greater support must be provided to the political process led by the African Union High-level Implementation Panel.

In order to facilitate all of those aspects, we must eliminate all obstacles. That is why we once again thank Ambassador Wronecka, Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1591 (2005) concerning the Sudan, for the work of the Committee in monitoring the activities of rebel groups in Darfur, Libya and South Sudan with a view to updating and imposing new sanctions to serve as a deterrent to activities that derail peace efforts.

In conclusion, we once again applaud the Sudanese Government and UNAMID for their peace efforts in Darfur and urge them to redouble their efforts for the sake of the Sudanese population in general and the people of Darfur in particular, and to appeal to the international community to lend all necessary support to the establishment of peace and peacebuilding in order to ensure the rebuilding of Darfur and the launching of a plan for its development.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the Joint Special Representative for Darfur and Head of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), Mr. Jeremiah Mamabolo, for his comprehensive introduction of the Secretary-General's bimonthly report Organization (S/2018/154). Through him, we also commend the work that the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur is conducting on the ground. Finally, we thank Ambassador Joanna Wronecka for her 90-day report on the activities of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1591 (2005) concerning the Sudan. As this is the first time she has spoken in the Chamber in her capacity as Chair, we wish her every success in her duties, and we express our support for this session of the Committee's work.

At the outset, we stress the positive aspects highlighted in the Secretary-General's report, mainly in the field of security, which has remained stable, as in past reporting periods. The fact that no major confrontations have occurred between the Sudanese Government and the rebel groups of Darfur is essential to maintaining stability and focusing the efforts of the Government and UNAMID on consolidating peace and advancing the political process in order to address the root causes of the conflict, including land ownership, and driving development in Darfur.

We also note the progress made in the Government-led weapons-collection campaign. We believe that this process helps to improve the security situation in Darfur. Its success is critical to bolstering security in communities and to stable and sustainable peacebuilding. To that end, we must avoid division and promote the commitment of the civilian population and the militias. This Government campaign, which is in line with UNAMID's peacebuilding process, requires the decisive support of the international community

In that regard, we welcome the timely visit of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict to Darfur, Ms. Virginia Gamba. We join her in recognizing the encouraging efforts of the Government of the Sudan in the implementation of the action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts. We are aware that there is still a lot of work to be done, but there has been significant progress.

Regarding the humanitarian situation, we regret that clashes between factions of the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid have produced new displacements in Jebel Marra. However, we note improved access of humanitarian assistance to this area, which was previously inaccessible. Nevertheless, it is evident that the situation of internally displaced persons in general is worrisome and, despite the intense efforts of the Government, UNAMID and humanitarian workers, it still presents several challenges. It is urgent that the international community support the development of projects that enable internally displaced persons to access basic services and to improve their quality of life.

We note that no new cases of obstruction of humanitarian assistance have been reported, which reflects the good relationship between and joint work of the Government and the various United Nations agencies. We hope to continue improving the operational environment of UNAMID. We also express our appreciation for the work carried out by the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the World Food Programme and other humanitarian agencies.

On the other hand, although human rights violations and other types of crimes have decreased compared to the previous period, we must redouble efforts to put an end to illegal detention and violence against women and girls, particularly sexual gender-based violence, and must bring those responsible to justice.

Bolivia believes that the political situation remains one of the main challenges facing the Sudan. We welcome Government efforts to promote the implementation of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur. We stress that the only possible solution to the situation in that area is a political process that can address the root issues of the conflict and its attendant consequences.

We must enhance efforts to resolve differences over the Doha Document and we call on the non-signatory movements to engage constructively in dialogue with the Government with a view to achieving a definitive cessation of hostilities. In that connection, we welcome the efforts of the Joint Special Representative for Darfur, Mr. Jeremiah Mamabolo, UNAMID and the members of the African Union High-level Implementation Panel responsible for the implementation of the recommendations for the Sudan and South Sudan.

We also commend the progress made in the reconfiguration process of UNAMID, the successful completion of the phase one and the launch of phase two. We must make sure to strengthen the capabilities of the United Nations country team in order to ensure a successful withdrawal from the Hybrid Operation.

In conclusion, we look forward to the next visit of the Chairman of the 1591 Committee. We would do well to review the measures imposed by the Council on that country to ensure that they are suited to the current situation on the ground.

Mr. Temenov (Kazakhstan): We join others in expressing our deep appreciation to Joint Special Representative Mamabolo for his comprehensive briefing on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) and to Ambassador Wronecka for her first 90-day report on the work of Committee established pursuant to resolution 1591 (2005) concerning the Sudan. My delegation endorses the outcome of the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/154) and would like to offer the following observations.

Kazakhstan is encouraged by the continuing improvement in the security and humanitarian situation in Darfur, as well as the strengthened cooperation between the Sudanese Government, the United Nations and the African Union. We hope that the arms-collection campaign, which positively contributed to an improved security situation and an overall reduction in criminal activities, will be inclusive and conducted in respect of citizens' rights. We welcome the extensions of the unilateral ceasefire by parties to the conflict and hope that they will undertake the necessary measures to invigorate an inclusive political process led by the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel. We hope that the recent meeting between President Al-Bashir and the leader of the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army-Second Revolution, Abu Al-Qasim, will facilitate the implementation of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur and further contribute to ensuring the voluntary return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. Kazakhstan is pleased to note the timely conclusion of phase one of the reconfiguration of UNAMID. We expect that its second phase will also be successfully implemented in accordance with the established timeline.

In view of the significantly improved security situation, we now need to prioritize UNAMID's peacebuilding mandate, including support for capacity-building and quick-impact and community stabilization measures. Such efforts should focus on the

implementation of the UNAMID Integrated Strategic Framework for Darfur and the United Nations country team for the period 2017-2019, which has identified priorities related to bringing about sustainable peace in Darfur. We express our support for the upcoming visit by Ambassador Wronecka, Chair of the 1591 Committee, to Khartoum. We hope that the visit will further contribute to the strengthening of constructive cooperation between the United Nations and the Sudanese Government.

In conclusion, we call on the international community to provide the needed support to the Government of the Sudan to address the root causes of the conflict, including through providing basic services in remote areas, finding durable solutions for IDPs and making the arms-collection campaign a success.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks Mr. Jeremiah Mamabolo, Joint Special Representative for Darfur and Head of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) for his excellent briefing on the implementation of UNAMID's mandate. It also thanks Ambassador Joanna Wronecka, in her capacity as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1591 (2005) concerning the Sudan, for her briefing on the work of the Committee.

My statement will centre on the following issues: developments in the security, political and humanitarian situation in Darfur and the implementation of UNAMID's mandate.

Concerning the security situation, Côte d'Ivoire commends the progress made in terms of security and notes with satisfaction the commitment of the Sudanese Government to working towards establishing a stable and secure environment for the people of Darfur. Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the fact that the weapons-collection campaign initiated by the Government has contributed to a decrease in crime and intercommunal conflicts. My country therefore urges the Government to pursue that initiative by encouraging inclusiveness and respect for human rights and prior commitments aimed at ensuring stability in the Kalma internally displaced persons camp. The Ivorian delegation welcomes the extension of the ceasefire effected and agreed upon by the Sudanese Government and rebel groups, and calls on the latter to show a greater willingness to reach a permanent ceasefire through dialogue.

Concerning the political context, Côte d'Ivoire is concerned about the stalemate in the implementation of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur. My country encourages stakeholders to fully implement the terms of the agreement with a view to finding a lasting solution to the root causes of the conflict in the interest of the Sudanese people. While we welcome the initiatives taken by the African Union High-level Implementation Panel for the Sudan and South Sudan in resuming the national dialogue and implementing the Doha agreement, Côte d'Ivoire calls on non-signatory armed groups to prioritize the interests of the people of Darfur and join the agreement. Similarly, owing to the importance of land management in the Sudanese conflict, Côte d'Ivoire encourages the Government of the Sudan to implement the "Right to land restitution policy" so as to provide a solution to one of the root causes of the conflict as quickly as possible.

With regard to the humanitarian situation, my country welcomes the improvement of humanitarian access in Darfur, including in Jebel Marra. It is nevertheless concerned about the recent displacement of persons during the reporting period, as registered in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/154), as well as the heightened risk of food insecurity. My delegation therefore calls on the international community to provide assistance to those people in need, and urges the Sudanese authorities to continue to work to establish an environment that is conducive to the return of people to their areas of origin. Likewise, Côte d'Ivoire encourages UNAMID to maintain its assistance in strengthening the capacity of judicial and human rights institutions so as to address allegations of human rights violations more effectively.

Concerning UNAMID, my country commends its efforts to stabilize Darfur and congratulates the Mission on the scheduled launch of phase two of the reconfiguration pursuant to resolution 2363 (2017). Accordingly, Côte d'Ivoire welcomes improved cooperation between the Sudanese Government and UNAMID. The opening of the Golo team site demonstrates the Government's willingness to assist the Mission in that important process towards establishing lasting peace in Darfur. Côte d'Ivoire therefore calls on the Sudanese authorities to pursue their work and ensure that the terms of the status of forces agreement are respected so as to enable UNAMID to carry out its mandate without hindrance.

In conclusion, my country congratulates Ambassador Joanna Wronecka for the work she has done in her capacity as Chair of the 1591 Sudan sanctions committee, and reaffirms its support for her upcoming visit to the region. It also congratulates the Sudanese Government on its work in improving the security and humanitarian situation in Darfur.

The President: I wish to again encourage all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Sudan.

Mr. Mohamed (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month. I would also like to express our thanks to your predecessor, the Permanent Representative of Kuwait, for his able leadership of the Council in February.

I hope that in the time allowed I will be able to comment on the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/154), the briefings of Mr. Jeremiah Mamabolo and Ambassador Joanna Wronecka, and the statements of the other Council members who took the floor this morning. I count on your understanding, Mr. President.

First of all, I would like to address the Joint Special Representative for Darfur and the Head of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), Mr. Jeremiah Mamabolo, and thank him for his briefing and for his affirmation that the situation in Darfur today is characterized by a general absence of war. This is largely due to the adoption in June of resolution 2363 (2017), which has transformed the situation in Darfur and moved it into the peacebuilding phase. In this phase, we are all joining efforts aimed at successfully bring an end to tensions and return to status quo before 2003.

Between 2003 and 2018, Darfur underwent a great transformation, and I personally witnessed and participated in all of the different phases and processes in this time frame, always in search of peace — in Chad, Abuja, Doha, Geneva, Addis Ababa, Bahir Dar and elsewhere around the world. I am pleased and honoured that we are now reaping the fruits of our efforts to achieve peace. Peace is important and it is part of the beliefs and constituents of the Sudanese people throughout history.

I also thank the members of the Council for their concern for the situation in Darfur and for their recommendations, which we will definitely implement. We thank them for understanding the phase that the peace process has reached in Darfur and in other parts of the Sudan. We have reviewed the most recent periodic report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the UNAMID mandate in Darfur, which is presented every 60 days. We continue to believe that limiting the reporting period to 60 days is a constraint on UNAMID and the Secretariat at a time when Darfur is witnessing complete stability and significant progress in all aspects, resulting in reports that look very much alike and contain nothing new. I would like to add that since there is nothing new in these reports, except some petty crimes and incidents reported at police stations, this proves that the situation in Darfur has indeed been transformed.

With regard to the implementation of resolution 2363 (2017), which provides for the reconfiguration of UNAMID and its gradual withdrawal, we affirm that the Darfur situation has entered a new phase of peacebuilding and working towards achieving stability, security and peace in all states of Darfur. This is in line with what the Sudanese Government has continually called for since 2015, namely, that we must adapt to the significant transformations that have taken place in Darfur, by which the nature of the conflict has changed. In fact, nothing remains of the conflict except with respect to the two issues of displaced persons and development, which are issues of importance throughout the developing world and directly linked to the agenda of peace. The time has come for the Secretariat to change its approach and bring it into alignment with the position of the Security Council.

The people and the Government of the Sudan are now on the verge of a new phase of peace, stability and serious work in which they are seeking development in Darfur and throughout the country. As they embrace peaceful coexistence, they begin the reconstruction of their country with no difference between the State, popular, collective or individual efforts. The world saw the Sudanese girl Imtithal Mahmoud walk for 30 days from Fashir to Khartoum, covering a very long distance, which heralded the arrival of peace cultured in the Sudanese people. We hope that this will motivate the international community to support and encourage

the Sudanese Government as it moves forward with the support of the people of Darfur to consolidate and sustain peace.

One of the major projects is the campaign to collect arms from the citizens now that the reasons that led to the acquisition of these arms in 2003 no longer exist. Reports indicate that as planned, this campaign has been very effective, despite limited resources. We are determined to carry on with the campaign. As we have affirmed previously, it is necessary to collect weapons in order to achieve stability and security. The Secretary-General and everybody else have seen the positive impact of the weapons-collection campaign on the security situation in Darfur. The Government will therefore spare no effort to make this campaign a success. In this regard, we emphasize the importance of our partnership with UNAMID and the ongoing consultations and meetings with the Joint Representative for Darfur. We congratulate him on his continued efforts aimed at bringing peace to Darfur and Africa.

We look forward to concluding phase two of the UNAMID downsizing, closing some of its sites and achieving staff reductions pursuant to resolution 2363 (2017). The Sudanese Government emphasizes that it will continue to cooperate with UNAMID so as to allow it to fulfil its mandate completely. We also affirm the importance of this cooperation in all areas, which has been documented in the report before us and previous reports, particularly with respect to unloading containers, issuing visas, giving movement permission and access to the Mission and humanitarian partners, as well as responding to UNAMID's request to open a temporary operations base in Golo. We would ask UNAMID and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to reconsider the issue of constructing the Zalenge-Golo-Rokero road, which would greatly serve the people of the region and rehabilitate the service facilities there.

We thank the Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1591 (2005) concerning the Sudan for her report, and the Security Council for reducing the number of members of the Panel of Experts by one, who is Abhai Kumar. We confirm the statement of the previous Chair of the sanctions committee, to the effect that the sanctions regime must respond to the positive developments in general in Darfur, in line with resolution 2363 (2017), and that this can happen only by reducing the number of members of the Panel of Experts. The Panel must conclude its work and lift the sanctions. We are pleased to inform the Council that the Sudanese Government has approved the upcoming visit to Khartoum of the Chair of the sanctions committee, Ambassador Wronecka, in April.

As for what some members of the Council said with respect to the number of displaced persons, I note that the resident representative of the United Nations in the Sudan, in coordination with the Humanitarian Aid Commission, confirmed six months ago that the number of displaced persons did not exceed 1.7 million. We are hopeful that that number has fallen further in the six months since that announcement. We would request that the correct figures be promulgated, as issued by the United Nations relevant bodies.

In conclusion, we commend all the strenuous efforts made to consolidate the peace process. We once again welcome the dawn of peace and the launch of development, ending the conflict once and for all. The delegation of my country thanks UNAMID for its efforts in various fields and for the sacrifices of its peacekeepers in the past years. We also thank troop- and police-contributing countries and reiterate the readiness of the Government of the Sudan to cooperate with all regional and international partners in all matters related to UNAMID so as to guarantee its success until the last of its components leaves the territories of my country.

The President: I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.8203

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8203rd meeting

Wednesday, 14 March 2018, 3.25 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Van Oosterom	(Netherlands)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

Letter dated 13 March 2018 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/218)

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18-07096 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Letter dated 13 March 2018 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/218)

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/218, which contains a letter dated 13 March 2018 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I thank you, Sir, for arranging this urgent meeting of the Security Council today to give the United Kingdom the opportunity to update Council colleagues on our investigation into a nerve agent attack in Salisbury.

On Sunday, 4 March, Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia Skripal were found in the town centre, slipping out of consciousness on a public bench, and were taken to hospital by our emergency services, where they remain in very serious condition. Investigations by world-leading experts of the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down, accredited by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), discovered that they had been exposed to a nerve agent. British police officer Nick Bailey was also exposed and remains in hospital in serious condition.

Hundreds of British citizens have been potentially exposed to this nerve agent in what was an indiscriminate and reckless act against the United Kingdom. We have deployed our military to secure and decontaminate numerous sites. The police continue an exhaustive, wide-scale investigation. Through those investigations, we have concluded that Mr. Skripal and his daughter were poisoned with a Novichok — a military-grade nerve agent of a type developed by Russia. It is not a weapon that can be manufactured by non-State actors. It is so dangerous that it requires the highest-grade State laboratories and expertise.

Based on the knowledge that Russia has previously produced this agent, and combined with Russia's record of conducting State-sponsored assassinations, including against former intelligence officers whom it regards as legitimate targets, the United Kingdom Government concluded that it was highly likely that Russia was responsible for this reckless act. We saw only two plausible explanations. Either this was a direct attack by Russia on my country, or Russia had lost control of a military-grade nerve agent that it had developed.

We requested the Russian Government to provide an explanation by the end of Tuesday, 13 March, on how this Russian-produced nerve agent could have been deployed in Salisbury. It has provided no credible explanation, which could suggest that it had lost control of its nerve agent. We therefore have no alternative but to conclude that the Russian State was responsible for the attempted murder of Mr. Skripal, his daughter and police officer Nick Bailey, and for threatening the lives of other British citizens in Salisbury. This was no common crime. It was an unlawful use of force and a violation of Article 2 of the Charter of the United Nations — the basis of the international legal order.

The United Kingdom is proud to have been one of the States that played an integral role in drafting the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), a landmark piece of international law. We are therefore dismayed that Russia has suggested that our response fails to meet the requirements of the Convention. Article VII of the Convention calls on States parties to implement the Convention under their own legislation. The United Kingdom has enacted the Chemical Weapons Act in order to fully comply with this obligation. That legislation, together with relevant criminal law, is now guiding our investigation into this incident, as the Convention was designed to ensure.

This was an attack on United Kingdom soil. Under the Convention, we have the right to lead our response, engaging the OPCW and others, as appropriate. On 8 March, the United Kingdom formally notified the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW that a chemical attack had taken place on United Kingdom soil.

The Russian Federation has complained that we are not acting under article IX of the Convention. On the contrary, on 12 March, once it became clear to us that the United Kingdom had been attacked, the

Foreign Secretary summoned the Russian Ambassador and sought an explanation from his Government, as article IX clearly sets out we have the right to do. We have received no meaningful response. It is therefore Russia that is failing to comply with the provisions of the Convention. The Council should not fall for their attempt to muddy the waters. In addition, the United Kingdom has welcomed the offer of technical assistance from the Director-General of the OPCW. We have invited the Technical Secretariat to independently verify our analysis. We are making every effort to expedite that process.

Let us now turn to the part of the Chemical Weapons Convention that Russia is not talking about, which requires States parties to declare chemical weapons stockpiles and facilities that have been used at any time since 1946 to produce chemical weapons. Chemical weapons were to be verifiably destroyed and production facilities destroyed or converted, subject to approval, within 10 years of the entry into force of the Convention. Russia completed the destruction of its declared stockpile in September 2017, 10 years later than required by the Convention and five years beyond the single five-year extension period. Russia did not declare Novichok agents or the production facilities associated with them, as it was required to do under the Convention. No development facilities were declared. Yet we know from the testimony of the Russian scientist Vil Mirzayanov that Novichok agents were developed as part of the Soviet Union's offensive chemical warfare programme and that they were inherited by the Russian Federation. Such facilities associated with that programme should have been declared under the CWC. Even today, a Russian politician said that Russia had destroyed the Novichok nerve gas.

From all I have said, we can conclude that Russia is in serious breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention through its failure to declare the Novichok programme. That fact alone means that the Security Council should discount any arguments it hears about the possibility of other countries having inherited that technology. Had Russia declared and destroyed its own programme, there might have been some truth to that.

On 4 March, a weapon so horrific that it is banned from use in war was used in a peaceful city in my country. That was a reckless act, carried out by people who disregard the sanctity of human life and who are indifferent to whether innocent people are caught up in their attacks. They either did not care that the weapon used would be traced back to them or mistakenly believed that they could cover their tracks.

Russian officials and media channels have repeatedly threatened those whom they consider traitors even after the attack on 4 March. Russia has a history of State-sponsored assassinations, including that of Alexander Litvinenko, who was poisoned by radioactive materials in my country a decade ago. Russia has a history of interfering in other countries — whether the failed coup in Montenegro, repeated cyberattacks on other States or seeking to influence the democratic processes of other countries. Russia has a history of flouting international law, most egregiously in Crimea, eastern Ukraine, and Georgia. Russia shows disregard for civilian life. We all remember Flight MH-17, shot down by Russian proxies supplied with Russian weapons. In its repeated protection of the use of chemical weapons by Al-Assad, Russia has shown that it has different standards when it comes to the use of those terrible substances.

We have not jumped to conclusions. We have carried out a thorough and careful investigation, which continues. We are asking the OPCW to independently verify the nerve agent used. We have offered Russia the chance to explain but Russia has refused. We have therefore concluded that the Russian State was involved and we have taken certain measures in response. In taking such measures, we have been clear that we have no disagreement with the people of Russia, who have been responsible for so many great achievements throughout history. It is the reckless acts of their Government that we oppose.

We are grateful for the support of so many countries around the world. We will come back to the Council as the investigations make more progress and will continue to keep it informed. We have already heard the attacks and threats that Russia has made over the past few days. We know that there will be more to come. That is how Russia has acted in every other case where it has been caught flouting international law — denial, distraction and threats. That is what Russia does. However, we will not allow such threats to deter us. We will not weaken our resolve. We will stand firm, confident in our democracy, our rule of law and the freedom of our people. We will stand by the values that are shared by the overwhelming majority of those on the Council at the United Nations. We ask them today to stand by us.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I thank my British colleagues for calling this important meeting.

We are here today to discuss the use of a chemical weapon by one Council member on the territory of another Council member. Let me make one thing clear from the very beginning — the United States stands in absolute solidarity with Great Britain. The United States believes that Russia is responsible for the attack on two people in the United Kingdom, using a military-grade nerve agent. Dozens of civilians and first responders were also exposed. Police officer Nick Bailey was the first to arrive on the scene and remains hospitalized in serious condition. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the victims of that atrocious crime.

No two nations enjoy a stronger bond than that between the United States and the United Kingdom. Ours is truly a special relationship. When our friends in Great Britain face a challenge, the United States will always be there for them. Alone, Russia's crime is worthy of the Council's action. However, this is not an isolated incident. The assassination attempt in Salisbury is part of an alarming increase in the use of chemical weapons. Last year, the North Korean regime used the nerve agent VX to publicly assassinate Kim Jong Un's brother in a Malaysian airport. In Syria, the Al-Assad regime continues to kill its own people with chemical weapons years after the Council adopted resolution 2118 (2013) to remove the threat from Syria's chemical weapons programme. When the Security Council created a mechanism to investigate chemical weapons attacks, the mechanism was targeted when it began to shine a spotlight on Al-Assad's role in killing his own people.

A growing concern in all that dangerous and destabilizing activity is Russia. Russia failed to ensure that Syria destroyed its chemical weapons programme. Russia put an end to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism when it found that Al-Assad was liable for chemical attacks. Russia used its veto to shield Al-Assad five times last year. It has also provided cover for Syria at the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in The Hague.

The Russians complained recently that we criticize them too much. If the Russian Government stopped using chemical weapons to assassinate its enemies and helping its Syrian allies to use chemical weapons to kill Syrian children, and if it cooperated with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons by turning over all information related to this nerve agent, we would stop talking about it. We take no pleasure in having to constantly criticize Russia but we need Russia to stop giving us so many reasons to do so.

Russia must fully cooperate with the United Kingdom's investigation and come clean about its own chemical weapons programme. Russia is a permanent member of the Security Council. Under the Charter of the United Nations, it is entrusted with upholding international peace and security. It must account for its actions.

If we do not take immediate, concrete measures to address this now, Salisbury will not be the last place we see chemical weapons used. They could be used here in New York or in cities of any country that sits on the Council. This is a defining moment. Time and time again, Member States say that they oppose the use of chemical weapons under any circumstance. Now, one member stands accused of using chemical weapons on the sovereign soil of another member. The credibility of the Council will not survive if we fail to hold Russia accountable.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the United Kingdom for having taken the initiative to convene this important meeting and for the information it has provided on the situation following the attempted assassination of two Russian citizens on its soil on 4 March in Salisbury.

At the outset, allow me to reiterate to our British friend and ally all the support that was expressed yesterday and today by our highest authorities following an unacceptable attack, which President Macron condemned without reservation. In the name of the cardinal values we share — first and foremost the rule of law and the commitment to the principles of peace and security of which the Council is the guardian and guarantor — I would like to offer the United Kingdom the full support and solidarity of France. There can be no ambiguity with regard to our position on this.

Let us be clear. This assassination attempt in a public place using a military-grade toxic nerve agent, as reported to us, and which has affected other civilians in British territory, is totally unacceptable. Theresa May spoke today in the House of Commons and stated that Russia is responsible in this attack. We have full confidence in the British investigation to shed light on the precise circumstances of this use of a chemical

weapon. It is essential that those who are at the origin of the use of this chemical weapon be clearly identified and prosecuted, and that all appropriate responses be made as soon as possible to the issues raised by the United Kingdom in this investigation.

Let us make no mistake. The facts and the issues at stake are extremely serious. The ban on the use of chemical weapons lies at the heart of the non-proliferation regime that underpins our system of collective security, as created and enshrined by the Council and all its members.

The haphazard re-emergence of these barbaric weapons with deadly consequences, which can be seen not only in their recurrent use in Syria and the Middle East, but also in Asia and now in Europe, cannot be tolerated. It flouts the principles that form the basis of peace and security; it undermines the non-proliferation architecture, built stone by stone over the course of decades; and it calls into question strategic stability. We have repeatedly warned the Council of the risk of the re-emergence of these weapons, their proliferation to all types of actors, and the threat this situation poses to the collective security system that we have gradually built together.

Let us be very aware that we have reached a new phase — that of the use of a substance that was never declared to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the use of which is prohibited by the Convention, in a public place on the territory of a European country. France will never accept impunity for those who use or develop toxic agents. In that regard, we recall our full support for existing institutions, in particular the OPCW. That is also the reason why France launched an international partnership in January, aimed at supporting existing instruments in the fight against impunity in the use of these weapons.

We must remain more mobilized than ever in the fight against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the impunity of those who intend to use them. It is a priority and a major responsibility for all of us, as well as a responsibility of the Security Council, and we will be judged on it. In that respect, France affirms its resolute commitment to that end, alongside its partners and allies, within the Council and in all circumstances that require it.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Security Council is meeting to discuss the use of chemical weapons. Regardless of the wording of the agenda item that we are discussing today, be it "Letter from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom" or "Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction", we believe that this is an issue of concern. Attempted assassination is a dangerous crime that has an impact on the security and safety of civilians and could undermine relations among Member States.

The State of Kuwait holds a principled and firm position condemning the use, production, acquisition, stockpiling or retention of chemical weapons, as well as their direct or indirect transfer. This position is based on article I of the Chemical Weapons Convention. We call on all Member States that have ratified the Convention to adhere to its provisions and eliminate all their stockpiles of toxic chemical material.

The United Kingdom called for the convening of this meeting because of a hostile act committed on its territory that violates international norms and conventions related to chemical weapons. We underscore the right of the United Kingdom or any other country subjected to similar acts to undertake all the necessary investigations and carry out the appropriate measures in order to protect its national security and punish the perpetrators of such criminal act.

Lastly, we call on all States that bear a special responsibility in maintaining international peace and security, as well as all other States that express their commitment to the Charter of the United Nations, to undertake clear and sincere steps towards achieving the objective of creating a world free of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction. In that regard, we recall resolution 2325 (2016), which reaffirms that the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and their means of delivery poses a danger to international peace and security.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Republic of Equatorial Guinea has learned of the attack involving the use a chemical nerve agent in Salisbury, United Kingdom, and we hope that events such as those will be duly investigated, that the results of those investigations will be made public, and that those responsible will face justice.

With regard to the accusations concerning the involvement of the Russian Federation in the incident reported by the Government of the United Kingdom, Equatorial Guinea hopes that both parties, the United Kingdom and the Russian Federation, will be

able to address and resolve the situation in the most appropriate way possible through direct contact and by fully clarifying the facts. That is why we recommend that while the investigations are being carried out, both parties — the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom — demonstrate moderation. We invite both parties to work closely on the investigations being conducted to shed light on the situation. We thank the United Kingdom for its initiative to invite independent and volunteer investigators to carry out the analyses necessary to resolve this complex situation.

In conclusion, I would like to make it clear that the Republic of Equatorial Guinea is completely opposed to the production, stockpiling, distribution and use of chemical, biological, bacteriological and other similar products on human beings, which are at variance with the relevant international treaties. We therefore condemn such use regardless of its perpetrators. We wish Mr. Sergei Skripal, his daughter and others who were affected by the incident a speedy recovery.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to thank the representative of the United Kingdom for his initiative to convene today's meeting.

Poland is gravely concerned about the use of a nerve agent in an attempt to murder Mr. Sergei Skripal and Ms. Yulia Skripal, which endangered the lives of innocent civilians. Poland has always been a committed supporter of curbing chemical weapons. In that regard, we condemn the unprecedented attack on the territory of the United Kingdom — the first of its kind in Europe since the Second World War. After the continued use of chemicals as weapons in Syria, this is another clear example of the violation of international law and the provisions of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction.

We express our full solidarity with the British people and Government and our readiness to support our close ally and European partner in the conduct of the investigation. At the same time, we call on Russia to address the United Kingdom's questions and appropriately cooperate with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in that regard. Poland strongly believes that there is no place for impunity. Those responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be held accountable.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank you, Sir, for convening today's meeting. I also thank the representative of the United Kingdom for his statement.

In line with Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations, we believe that it is important to update the Security Council on situations that could give rise to an international dispute. Peru believes that the use of chemical weapons is a threat to international peace and security, violates the non-proliferation regime and endangers the lives of civilians. Therefore, we express our deep concern about the use of a nerve agent in a public area, which put the lives of at least three people in the United Kingdom in serious danger. We deplore the fact that the incident occurred and express our solidarity with the victims. The incident should be investigated within the framework of the rule of law and due process, through the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and other competent entities. The parties concerned must fully cooperate to ensure a credible investigation that determines and punishes those responsible in line with relevant international law.

In conclusion, we stress that communication channels must remain open in order to resolve the situation.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I thank the delegation of the United Kingdom for updating the Security Council on the use of nerve agents in Salisbury on 4 March.

Sweden condemns in the strongest terms the use of a nerve agent in an attempted murder on British soil. We stress the seriousness of that incident, which is unprecedented in Europe in recent years. Those responsible for the attack must be identified and held to account for their heinous actions. Given that a nerve agent developed as a chemical weapon has been used and the possibility that the attempted murder has links to State actors, Sweden supports the decision of the United Kingdom to bring the issue to the attention of the Security Council and other relevant bodies, such as the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. We stand by the United Kingdom and, like other European Union partners, express our strong solidarity with the Government of the United Kingdom and support its efforts in dealing with this grave security issue.

We note that, in her letter to the Secretary-General (S/2018/218, annex), the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom states that the class of chemical warfare agents used was originally developed by the Soviet Union and

inherited by the Russian Federation. Given that fact and taking into account the principal victim's background, we support the request of the United Kingdom that Russia provide an account of how the agent could have come to be used in Salisbury.

Let me also take this opportunity to stress the importance that Sweden attaches to the ban on chemical weapons. Such barbaric and illegal weapons kill indiscriminately and have no place in the world. We must ensure that the integrity of the Chemical Weapons Convention is fully respected.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Côte d'Ivoire was saddened to learn about the use of a chemical nerve agent on British soil on 4 March in Salisbury. It expresses its sincere solidarity with the British Government and wishes those affected a speedy recovery. Côte d'Ivoire has always condemned the use of chemical weapons, regardless of the method employed. It also demands that light be shed on the incident in Salisbury.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): Kazakhstan is known for its clear and consistent position as an uncompromising opponent of all types of weapons of mass destruction, including chemical weapons. We condemn the use of weapons of mass destruction as immoral, inhuman and contrary to the principles of humanity. We express our deep concern about the tragic incident involving the possible use of chemical warfare agents on the territory of the United Kingdom. The use of chemical agents, regardless of location or target, is unacceptable.

At the same time, since this is a very politically sensitive issue, we must be extremely careful in drawing hasty conclusions without credible or convincing facts on the ground. The incident should be carefully investigated and all conclusions must be substantiated. We believe that an international response to the incident should be considered only after an exhaustive, transparent, objective and impartial investigation, undertaken in accordance with existing norms of international law, primarily on the basis of the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

We hope that both parties can resolve the contradictions and disputes between them by diplomatic means and normalize relations for the benefit of global stability and security.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We have taken note of the information we received today about the events that took place on 4 March. Bolivia would once again like to express its firm and absolute condemnation of the use of chemicals as weapons, which is an unjustifiable and criminal act, regardless of where, when or by whom it is committed. This is a serious violation of international law and international peace and security, and we hope that it will be investigated by the appropriate bodies methodically, technically, thoroughly, conclusively and without politicization.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): We have been following the news about the nerve-agent attack in Salisbury, in the United Kingdom. We would like to express our sympathy for and solidarity with the families of the victims, as well as the Government and the people of the United Kingdom. We have taken note of the letter that was circulated yesterday (S/2018/218, annex) from the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom addressed to the Secretary-General on the incident, and we thank the delegation of the United Kingdom for its briefing today.

Our position on the use of chemical weapons is well known. We firmly condemn any use of chemical weapons by any State or non-State actor. The use of chemicals as weapons is unacceptable and constitutes a serious violation of international law. That said, we hope that the necessary independent investigation into the incident in Salisbury will be conducted and also vetted, including through consultation and the exchange of information on the basis of the relevant provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention, with a view to bringing those responsible to justice. We believe that cooperation in good faith between Russia and the United Kingdom will be critical to ensuring that this issue does not get out of hand and undermine relations between the two countries even further. In that regard, we hope and trust that given the very justifiable concern of the United Kingdom, all those concerned will cooperate fully so that the matter can be addressed fairly and in a way that will help to allay the concerns of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China has noted the recent poisoning incident in the United Kingdom.

We take note of the statements made by relevant countries on this incident. We hope that a comprehensive, objective and impartial investigation can be conducted, based on the facts and in accordance with the relevant international rules, and that it can reach

an evidence-based conclusion that can stand the test of facts and history. We hope that the relevant parties can handle the issue through the appropriate channels.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Yesterday, after the letter from the British Prime Minister (S/2018/218, annex) was circulated to the Security Council, the United Kingdom asked that closed consultations be held. It was we who asked the President of the Security Council to change the meeting format from closed consultations to an open briefing. We did that for a reason, because we wanted everyone to see what is going on here. In the letter, which contains totally irresponsible assertions and which I actually find it difficult to comment on in diplomatic terms, there are threats to a sovereign State and permanent member of the Security Council that are contrary to international law and Article 2, paragraph 4, of the Charter of the United Nations. I would like to try to understand whether our British colleagues understand that, at least.

The first question we want to ask is why the representatives of the United Kingdom have dragged this issue into the Security Council, thereby ignoring the established procedure that London is obliged to follow, in accordance with its international commitments — that is, going through the specialized bodies, assuming we are talking about the use of toxic chemicals on United Kingdom territory. The response to that question is obvious to us. Our partners have dragged the issue into the forum of the Security Council because they know that the their arguments will not pass muster with the real experts on chemical weapons in The Hague. In reality, in other words, they are afraid of a genuine professional discussion of the subject, and this shows that the initiators of the meeting have entirely different motives for it.

The Russian Federation considers the unfounded accusations in British Prime Minister Theresa May's appeal of 13 March to the Secretary-General — to the effect that our country was allegedly involved in the use of poisonous substances in Salisbury — totally unacceptable. In what amounts to an ultimatum, it asks us to respond within 24 hours essentially to admit to committing a crime and to confess our guilt. We do not speak in the language of ultimatums with anyone. Nor do we let ourselves be spoken to in that kind of tone. But we are polite, and on 13 March we sent a note to the British Foreign Office affirming that Russia was not party to the incident and requesting samples of the substance involved and a joint investigation, particularly considering that one of the victims is a citizen of the Russian Federation. That was refused. In other words, while drumming up hysteria, London is acting in a wholly untransparent way. Today we heard reports of Russian diplomats being expelled and bilateral relations being frozen. Incidentally, I would like to ask my British colleague if that applies to the United Nations as well. There were also reports of a forthcoming cyberattack on Russia. Let this be a warning that this will not go unanswered.

We have been compelled to conclude that establishing the truth is the last thing the British authorities are interested in and that they have quite other motives. Their methods are those of the war by propaganda that have been refined in recent years, designed to produce a powerful information impact on an unenlightened and impressionable public. But there are no facts backing them up except their unfounded assertions about Russian tracks. Incidentally, this is far from being the first case of an attempt in the United Kingdom on the lives of Russian citizens or immigrants from Russia in extremely fishy circumstances, attempts that either still have not been investigated or about which we were refused any information. London should start by dealing with what is going on at home. Before blaming others, civilized people usually put their own house in order.

We suggested that the United Kingdom immediately launch the procedures provided for in paragraph 2 of article IX of the Chemical Weapons Convention, whereby a State party that receives a request from another State party for clarification shall provide the requesting State party with information as soon as possible, but in any case not later than 10 days after the request. Our British colleagues are aware of that, but have been in no hurry to invoke the Convention to which they are a party. We demand material proof of the alleged Russian tracks discovered in this high-profile affair. Without that, the allegedly irrefutable data carry no weight. So far we have seen nothing, except claims that this is "highly likely". In the circumstances, the right thing to do would be to ask the technical secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to carry out an independent laboratory analysis of the samples in the possession of the British authorities. I would now like to say a few words about chemistry.

There has been no scientific research and development conducted in the Russian Federation on what has been dubbed Novichok. Starting in the early 1970s, a large number of countries established programmes for creating new types of nerve and paralytic agents, known as VX, in particular in the United States and the Soviet Union. Russia terminated Soviet development efforts in the area of chemical weapons, in accordance with a decree issued by the President of the Russian Federation in 1992. In 2017, the Russian Federation completed the destruction of all of its existing stocks of chemical weapons, as verified by the OPCW, the relevant international entity. Incidentally, the United States has still not destroyed its chemical-weapon capacities.

In the mid-1990s, Western secret services brought a number of our specialists to the West, whose names are well known, as well as a certain amount of documentation. Research in this area has continued in both the United Kingdom and the United States. The positive achieved by these two countries in creating new toxic substances that for some reason are classified in the West under the general name Novichok are confirmed and reflected in more than 200 NATO-country open sources. We have the references for them and are ready to provide them to the Council. The actual identification of the toxic substance alleged to have been used in the incident was done at Porton Down, the British Ministry of Defence's research facility where the development and production of chemical weapons, including of this kind, is conducted. The most likely sources of this particular chemical are the countries that have been doing intensive research on such substances since the end of the 1990s, which include Great Britain.

We are not chemists here, so let me cite the opinion of a professional one. For the British specialists to state with complete confidence that this gas is Novichok and not something else, it would be essential for them to have a so-called control standard. In order to prove that it is the exact same compound, it has to be compared to that standard. Of necessity, if they state that this is a Novichok gas, they must have a standard for that substance. That means they have both a sample and a formula, and that is the most important piece of this whole story. In other words, if Great Britain is so dead certain that this is a Novichok gas, it has the formula and samples, and is itself capable of manufacturing it.

We are living in unusual times, and shocking things are happening before our very eyes. The presumption of innocence is in the process of being replaced by the presumption of guilt, and that principle of criminal law is now being transferred to international relations. Today Ambassador Haley, as if she were an experienced chemist and expert in that area, opined about Russia's crimes. We have long been familiar with the fact that she needs no investigations to identify the guilty parties. In her letter the British Prime Minister of the United Kingdom says that her scenario is "highly likely", but Mrs. Haley surpasses her trusty ally even in this.

If for the Soviet prosecutor Andrey Vyshinsky, confession was the queen of evidence, then today, in our Foreign Minister Lavrov's apposite words, it is suspicion that now plays that role. There is no longer any need even to show the Council test tubes containing an unknown white substance; it is sufficient to write a letter making egregious accusations about a sovereign State. We have already seen that with respect to Syria, and now they are trying to add Russia to the list of violators of the Convention. I would like to remind the Council about the United Kingdom's record of service in participating in illegal attacks on independent States, including on a basis of fake evidence. That led to immeasurable suffering among civilians in Yugoslavia, Iraq and Libya. Has the Council forgotten that Great Britain is notorious for being a State that has embraced the practice of targeted drone assassinations? In the context, hearing it heap invective on us is strange, and particularly so when it is based on no evidence.

There is a well-known principle in jurisprudence — and in life in general — "cui bono, or cui prodest", meaning, who benefits? What do members think? Does this incident benefit Russia on the eve of its presidential elections and the World Cup football championship? I can think of several countries right away — although, in accordance with the principle of the presumption of innocence, I will not name them — for which this incident, and blaming Russia for it, would be extraordinarily beneficial and timely. What motive could the British Prime Minister possibly ascribe to Russia for liquidating Sergei Skripal, who, after his prosecution, sentencing, prison term, pardon and handover to the British authorities, no longer posed any kind of threat to my country? But he is perfect for the role of victim, who can be used to justify all sorts of unthinkable lies, smears and derogatory public relations aimed at blackening Russia's reputation. We have been repeatedly warning that some kind of provocation along these lines could happen on the eve

of major events. Today we are witnesses to the fact that the Government of the United Kingdom will stop at nothing to deliberately tarnish Russia.

In his stories about Sherlock Holmes, the classic British writer Arthur Conan Doyle, famed in his own country and very popular in Russia, features a somewhat incompetent and comic character, Inspector Lestrade of Scotland Yard. He is not terribly intelligent and deduction is not his forte. His role is to serve as a foil for Sherlock Holmes's extraordinary detective powers. He instantly seizes on the superficial clues to a crime and rushes to draw obvious conclusions so that he can then be refuted by Holmes, who always discovers the real motive and clues behind the crime. God forbid I should suspect the current incumbents of Scotland Yard of unprofessionalism, although I do think that it would not hurt to have a Sherlock Holmes around today. Today, however, the people playing the role of the collective Inspector Lestrade are high-level members of the British Government, spouting irresponsible, unfounded, superficial, monstrous accusations that have far-reaching consequences. Russia calls on Britain's Government officials to renounce these practices of their nineteenth-century imperial past — the language of ultimatums, unproven accusations and threats — give up their neocolonialist ways and to return to life under the law. In situations such as those described in Theresa May's claims, the standard thing to do is to turn to instruments of legal assistance. To sum up, we would once again like to state the following.

Russia had nothing to do with this incident. We consider London's ultimatums null and void. We expect the United Kingdom to act in strict compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention and other relevant international instruments, including the European Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters, as well as to provide samples of the substance that the British investigation refers to for joint investigation, since it says that it is of Russian origin. That is a mandatory requirement under the Convention, not an optional one. We are ready for an investigation. We have nothing to fear and nothing to hide. We have already spoken about the procedure in paragraph 2 of article IX of the Chemical Weapons Convention. If the clarifications provided are considered inadequate, we can turn to the OPCW's governing bodies. That is the only civilized way to settle the issue. As long as we are being accused of violating the Convention with absolutely no proof, there is no other way to proceed. Until we can have a productive dialogue with specialists in this area we will not get anywhere. We are ready to cooperate openly and constructively within the framework of the OPCW.

In conclusion, we would like to circulate a draft press statement that sums up my statement and emphasizes the importance of activating the procedure in article IX of the Chemical Weapons Convention. We hope that all Council members will support it.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands supports the remarks made by the representative of the United Kingdom, who brought to our attention the urgent matter before us today. I would like to underline three points. They are about, first, our solidarity with the United Kingdom; secondly, the use of a chemical weapon; and thirdly, the importance of accountability.

Until the beginning of this month, it would have been hard to imagine a more peaceful place in the world than Salisbury, a quiet, historic town among the rolling hills of southern England. But its peace has been brutally disturbed. A man and his daughter were poisoned with a nerve agent. The United Kingdom was shocked. The world was shocked. The Kingdom of the Netherlands was shocked. On behalf of my Government, Stef Blok, our Minister for Foreign Affairs, has strongly condemned the attack and expressed our solidarity with the United Kingdom. People in the Netherlands feel for Yulia and Sergei Skripal and hope for the recovery of all the victims. We fully understand the outrage of the United Kingdom authorities. We also understand why this new incident is particularly painful for the people of the United Kingdom, who still have vivid memories of the brutal murder, using radioactive polonium, of Alexander Litvinenko in the heart of London. Now the United Kingdom finds itself dealing with a new and different case, of which the full details are yet to be determined. But one thing is already beyond doubt. No State can or should accept attacks that take place on its sovereign territory. The United Kingdom can count on the full solidarity of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in this.

My second point is about the use of a chemical weapon. We are gravely concerned about the type of weapon that was used in this attack, a military-grade

nerve agent and a substance that no regular criminals could easily get their hands on. This is the first time since the end of the Second World War that a nerve agent has been used in Europe. The recklessness of the act is beyond words. This nerve agent was used in a public space with many unsuspecting civilians around. It could have had even more horrible effects. I would also like to reiterate that any use of chemical weapons is abhorrent. The Kingdom of the Netherlands regards this a threat to international peace and security. It should therefore be a matter of concern for the Council, and we commend the United Kingdom for bringing it to our attention. After the recent chemical-weapon attacks in Syria, the attack in the United Kingdom is another warning to the world that we must step up our vigilance if we are to prevent the use of such weapons of mass destruction. We underline the important role of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in The Hague in that regard.

That brings me to my third and final point, which is accountability. There must be no impunity for this crime. My Government has stated that the Kingdom of the Netherlands fully supports the United Kingdom in its quest for the truth, and we call on all other countries to do so as well. The United Kingdom authorities had urged the Russian Federation to provide answers to their questions by yesterday. After Russia's failure to do so, we can understand why Prime Minister May announced bilateral measures earlier today. We see no reason for Russia to continue to refuse the United Kingdom's request. Nor do we see any legitimate reason why anyone should try to delay, sidetrack, second-guess or discredit the investigation carried out by the United Kingdom authorities. The international community cannot shrug its shoulders over this crime as if nothing had happened. The United Nations, the Council and all Member States should cooperate with the United Kingdom as it continues to investigate this gruesome act. The perpetrators should be brought to justice.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The representative of the United Kingdom has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): My Russian colleague has asked some questions that I thought I should answer.

He asked why we came to the Security Council. Is the Security Council not where a country comes when there has been a threat to international peace and security or an unlawful attack on it?

He asked if we will work with Russia here. Of course we will. We believe in the United Nations and its Security Council. We believe in the international rules-based system. We want the Council to work together to uphold international peace and security and to resolve conflict together. Of course we will work with Russia to achieve those aims here in the Council.

I set out in detail how the Chemical Weapons Convention works and its article IX in particular. The Council members have heard from me and from our Russian colleague, so I will not go into it in great detail again. I will simply say that under article IX, we have asked Russia for an explanation. Russia's response was to say that it considered our request to be null and void. We have also asked the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to support us with an independent verification of our analysis. Our Russian colleague talked about samples, but once again, that is a misunderstanding of the Convention. There are no provisions in the Convention that require the United Kingdom to share samples collected as part of a criminal investigation. The Chemical Weapons Convention does provide inspected State parties with a right to have duplicate copies of samples taken for the purposes of an inspection, but Russia is not an inspected State party in this case.

We are asked why we were so keen to request a quick answer. That comes from our past experience. One of the key tactics in the Russian playbook is to delay, delay, delay — distract and mire in procedural delay. We know that, of course, from the tragic Litvinenko case in 2006. We waited for months in the hope that Russia would cooperate with our requests to extradite and investigate the known suspects. We waited in vain, and we will not make the same mistake again.

Finally, my Russian colleague quotes fiction. Let me quote the Russian President when we think about who benefits. In 2010, he said,

> "Traitors will kick the bucket, believe me. Those other folks betrayed their friends, their brothers-in-arms. Whatever they got in exchange for it, those 30 pieces of silver they were given, they will choke on them."

The President: The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I am not planning to engage in a detailed discussion with my British colleague. I have already said everything I wanted to say in my statement.

I just want to emphasize one thing, which is that we have not received a formal request, in line with the Chemical Weapons Convention, to which we were and remain ready to respond. We were given a 24-hour ultimatum. Once again, let me stress that we have no intention of responding in a tone or form like those of the unsubstantiated accusations made against us before we had the opportunity to respond. But we are ready to cooperate with the British Government in investigating this sad incident. In my opinion, nothing that I said earlier contradicts that.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8204

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8204th meeting
Thursday, 15 March 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Van Oosterom	(Netherlands)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Lie Cheng
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Fiegolo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Peru	Mr. Duclos
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Ms. Tachco

Agenda

Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan

Special report of the Secretary-General on the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (S/2018/143)

Report of the Secretary-General on South Sudan (covering the period from 15 November 2017 to 16 February 2018) (S/2018/163)

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18-07171 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan

Special report of the Secretary-General on the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (S/2018/143)

Report of the Secretary-General on South Sudan (covering the period from 15 November 2017 to 16 February 2018) (S/2018/163)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of South Sudan to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2018/221, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by the United States of America.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to S/2018/143, which contains a special report of the Secretary-General on the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, and document S/2018/163, containing the report of the Secretary-General on South Sudan (covering the period from 15 November 2017 to 16 February 2018).

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China, Côte D'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, France, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Russian Federation, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America

The President: The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2406 (2018).

Recalling the Security Council's latest note 507 on its working methods (S/2017/507), I wish to encourage all participants, both members and non-members of the Council, to deliver their statements in five minutes or less to enable the Council to conduct its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the representative of South Sudan.

Mr. Malok (South Sudan): Allow me to express my appreciation for the opportunity to address the members of the Security Council on an issue that is of utmost importance to my country.

Despite the differences on some issues and the way in which the mandate is implemented, our continuous support for the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) is a clear indication of our appreciation for the work the Mission does in our country and a recognition of our shared objective of realizing peace in South Sudan. South Sudan therefore welcomes the renewal of the UNMISS mandate until 15 March 2019, during which time the Mission is asked to make several assessments. However, South Sudan would like to raise certain issues.

It is unfortunate that the Council chooses to politicize the peacekeeping resolution. There is a need to bridge the discrepancy between the primary responsibility of the State and the complementary support of the international community — in this case, UNMISS. Although South Sudan is now violently divided between the Government and the opposition, it is important to remember that the leadership was elected by the people and represents the legitimacy of the Government and the sovereignty of the country. Although it is practical to be connected to both parties and to work on fostering national consensus, the United Nations should work in collaboration with the current Government to address the practical problems facing the country.

It is one thing to condemn the leadership of the country and another to threaten the imposition of an arms embargo and sanctions, which, as I have repeatedly mentioned to the Council, would lead only to an adversarial relationship and aggravate the situation. It is worth reiterating that representatives of the international community visited South Sudan in the first place to support the country. Recent developments may indeed undermine the nature and magnitude of that support, but remedies can be found to restore a

constructive basis for partnership in the stabilization and development of the country. It would be an ironic double jeopardy to punish a country already suffering from an acute crisis.

My country's position is that punitive actions and punishment are counterproductive. The only solution to the conflict in South Sudan is through a political process in which President Salva Kiir Mayardit has continued to play an active role and made numerous compromises. The situation calls for cooperation as opposed to confrontation and threats of punitive actions, including the imposition of an arms embargo and sanctions. Therefore, we believe that it would be appropriate for UNMISS and the United Nations country team to meet with the relevant authorities in the Government to discuss and develop a strategy on the most constructive way to address the crisis and concurrently use their mutual strategic understanding as a basis for reaching out to the armed opposition.

The mischaracterization of the conflict in South Sudan has helped to fuel it. The conflict in South Sudan is political in nature, not ethnic. Every woman, child and man in South Sudan has been affected by the conflict in one way or another and everyone has a heartfelt story to tell. Therefore, alarming statements and reports of genocide instil fear, panic and despair, causing communities to flee, as witnessed in the aftermath of Adama Dieng's unfounded report. Furthermore, the continuous use of moral equivalence has emboldened other armed groups to act in an irresponsible manner, knowing that there will be collective blame and punishment. It is important to pinpoint who violates the law and where and when it is done in a timely manner.

As we have seen in some cases in South Sudan, internally displaced persons and refugees seeking shelter after displacement have often been exposed to further abuse and their wide-ranging subsistence needs are not met due to various constraints. We therefore welcome the Secretary-General's commitment to strictly enforcing his zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse. We also welcome the call on UNMISS to contribute to the safe, voluntary and dignified return of internally displaced persons and refugees to their homes so that they may resume their livelihoods.

South Sudan has taken steps to address some of the issues outlined in resolution 2406 (2018). There is an ongoing judicial process to address the Terrain Hotel incident in an open and transparent manner. The Government has also taken steps with regard to fees and taxes on non-governmental organizations and humanitarian agencies. It is essential that such efforts be acknowledged as a step in the right direction. The Government further commits to making changes as appropriate and to bettering the relationship. I would like to reiterate my Government's position that punitive actions and punishment are counterproductive.

In conclusion, we express our gratitude to the Council members who sought our views during negotiations.

The meeting rose at 10.20 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.8205

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8205th meeting

Thursday, 15 March 2018, 10.20 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Van Oosterom	(Netherlands)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Lie Cheng
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Ms. Tachco

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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18-07177 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The Council has before it the text of a statement by the President on behalf of the Council on the subject of today's meeting. I thank Council members for their valuable contributions to the statement.

In accordance with the understanding reached among the members of the Council, I shall take it that the members of the Security Council agree to the statement, which will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2018/5.

The meeting rose at 10.25 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.8206

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8206th meeting

Friday, 16 March 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Van Oosterom	(Netherlands)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Peru	Mr. Teny
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Mr. Miller

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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18-07334 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. De Mistura is joining the meeting via video-teleconference from Brussels.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Recalling the Security Council's latest note 507 on its working methods (S/2017/507), I wish to encourage all participants, both members and non-members of the Council, to deliver their statements in five minutes or less. Note 507 also encourages briefers to be succinct and to focus on key issues. Briefers are further encouraged to limit initial remarks to 15 minutes or less.

I now give the floor to Mr. De Mistura.

Mr. De Mistura: We have been constantly, around the clock, in touch with the Secretary-General, my colleagues in the field and all those with influence because, as the Security Council knows, many events, some of which are very worrisome, have taken place in the past few days.

On 7 March, I briefed the Council in consultations on the status of the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018). At that time, I said that there had not been any sustained ceasefire or adequate humanitarian access at that stage. On 12 March, the Secretary-General himself orally reported to the Council on the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) and United Nations efforts to create such conditions by using his own good offices or those of his own team, including ourselves (see S/PV.8201). The Secretary-General also underscored that it was incumbent on all the parties and on all those with influence in the Council, in the Astana process and in the broader International Syria Support Group to act on the resolution throughout Syria without delay.

Allow me to update the Council on where we stand on the matter since then — that is, since the Secretary-General gave a very comprehensive report — on the very day after the sad anniversary of the beginning of the conflict. We are entering the eighth year. In everything that we are doing in the horrific conflict, our compass — and I know the Council feels the same — has been, is and should be the Syrian people, wherever they are, who are telling us that they are fed up with the conflict and the way in which civilians are being affected in the cross-fighting. That is our compass. So whatever we do these days and whatever we suggest, including our current facilitation role, is constantly framed by the urgent needs of ordinary civilians — women, children and men.

Since the briefing by the Secretary-General, in the past few days further meetings have taken place between the Russian Federation and Jaysh Al-Islam on the outskirts of Douma, which is the northernmost of the three opposition-controlled enclaves in eastern Ghouta. The result of that engagement is a tenuous and fragile ceasefire between the Government, the Russian military and the Jaysh Al-Islam forces, which has now largely continued to hold for the sixth day. We hope that it will continue to do so, notwithstanding the engagement between Government forces and Jaysh Al-Islam in other areas outside Douma, such as the village of Reihan. In other words, the talks, the discussions and the ceasefire have been effected and implemented with Jaysh Al-Islam in Douma but not beyond.

However, that is only one part of eastern Ghouta. For example, the ceasefire is not being replicated in the rest of eastern Ghouta or elsewhere, and it is extremely fragile. While I speak, I understand that at this very moment there are some delicate meetings taking place regarding the follow-up to the arrangement regarding Douma. Let us therefore hope that the ceasefire holds because that would be at least one good piece of news among very bad news.

The United Nations has been practicably offering its good offices but efforts to facilitate meaningful contacts between the Russian Federation and Faylaq Al-Rahman or Ahrar Al-Sham have not yet produced results. They are dominant forces in the two other enclaves in eastern Ghouta — in Harasta and around Kafr Batna, Ayn Tarma, Arbin, Zamalka and Jobar, respectively. In those two other areas, we have not seen any ceasefire to speak of. Rather we have seen Government forces and their allies pursue a concerted escalation against those two enclaves with rapid ground offensives, accompanied by shelling and airstrikes. Reports of a public market in Kafr Batna having been

hit are just coming in. Of course, we need to verify them, since they are new reports.

Again, regrettably, there are numerous civilian casualties. We have also seen continuous shelling coming from those areas of eastern Ghouta inside civilian areas of Damascus again. We are also hearing from people inside eastern Ghouta, asking the United Nations, the Council and Member States with influence to pressure the armed opposition groups to let civilians leave and to pressure all parties for a ceasefire and protection for those who do not want to leave but want to stay. The bottom line of all this is that too many civilians are suffering and too many have died in that area.

Let me first say that it need not be that way. Negotiations in Douma in the past few days show that there is a way to create the conditions to advance the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018). As we have done so far, the United Nations therefore stands ready to offer its good offices to all parties to facilitate further engagement of that kind so as to make a concrete contribution to the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) in all areas of eastern Ghouta. The United Nations is not ready to facilitate ultimatums from either side. It stands ready to facilitate discussion, a ceasefire and evacuations. Meanwhile, violence has escalated across many other parts of Syria, where there is no ceasefire to speak of. In Afrin, the Turkish Government forces and their armed allies continue to gain ground rapidly. We have also received reports of shelling in besieged Fo'ah and Kafraya — two villages which, for a long time, have been held by the opposition. There have also been air strikes in Idlib and a new armed-opposition offensive in Hama. Clashes and air strikes have also occurred in Dar'a, southern Syria.

If now is the time for de-escalation, the Security Council had better convince me that de-escalation is indeed taking place. What we see on the map looks like the opposite — escalation. Let me re-emphasize that resolution 2401 (2018) cannot be applied piecemeal. It is not an à la carte menu. It applies to all non-Security-Council-listed terrorist groups across Syria. Let me also reiterate the words of the Secretary-General who stated that even efforts to combat terrorist groups identified by the Council do not supersede obligations under international law.

I am sure that members of the Council will have the opportunity to hear a briefing from Mr. Mark Lowcock. Meanwhile, since I have the opportunity to brief the Council today, let me provide some information about the humanitarian situation. On 13 March, the United Nations observed the evacuation of 147 civilians, including 10 critical medical cases — the majority of them women and children from Douma who sought shelter in rural Damascus. Based on the outcome of discussions and meetings between the Russian military and Jaysh al-Islam, facilitated by the United Nations, on 15 March, United Nations colleagues also delivered a convoy of food assistance to Douma for 26,100 people in need. Additional medical cases were also evacuated.

Let us be honest and admit that positive efforts are generally welcome and long overdue, but remain limited. Civilians require much more, including medical and health-care supplies, the restoration of water, commercial access and freedom of movement. Members of the Council must have seen the report in which Mr. Peter Maurer, who had been meeting with some of the people in eastern Ghouta, stated they were simply asking for water. They just needed water. Humanitarian colleagues who entered those areas spoke of having seen hunger, dire want, poverty, haggard faces and despair all around. Even for experienced people, such as my own humanitarian colleagues, it is an unsustainable situation in which people are on the brink of collapse a few kilometres — 20 minutes' drive — from Damascus. Let me be clear, that is only in Douma — an area which has seen a few days of ceasefire and positive movement on humanitarian access. Can we imagine the situation elsewhere? In other words, in the other two enclaves of eastern Ghouta further south, we have seen no ceasefire to speak of and to borrow the words of the Secretary-General, people are still living in hell on Earth.

Scores of people have been killed and wounded left unattended because health workers could not reach them due to the relentless air strikes. We have heard fresh allegations about the use of incendiary weapons in various urban areas and the targeting of medical facilities since 12 March, as well as new and disturbing allegations of chlorine use in those areas. As the Secretary-General has stated, we cannot independently verify those allegations but we also cannot and should not ignore them. We have also received reports of thousands of people displaced, some moving further into eastern Ghouta and many others exiting en masse in large groups, as a result of the advances of the Syrian Government in Hama, Noria and in Saqba.

Evacuations not observed by the United Nations are also reported to have taken place, including from Misraba and other areas. The United Nations was not present to observe those evacuations and is unable to know the precise number of them. We urge parties that all evacuations must take place in accordance with the highest protection standards under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Whether civilians choose to stay or leave, they must be protected against attacks and have access to the essentials to survive. They must be safe and voluntarily enter a place of their of choosing. The United Nations stands ready to provide assistance to people in need — those who choose to stay and those who want to leave.

We are also extremely concerned about the plight of civilians throughout Syria. They include the displaced, as well as almost 3 million in besieged and hard-to-reach areas and those caught up in escalations in Idlib, Hama, Aleppo and Dar'a. Resolution 2401 (2018) demands that all parties immediately lift the sieges of populated areas. To date, that has not occurred. According to my colleagues, the situation in Afrin is particularly worrying. We have received reports of tens of thousands of people displaced within Afrin and to nearby Tell Rifaat and surrounding villages, Nubul and Zahra, and other areas of Aleppo governorate.

The United Nations has also received reports of civilian casualties and restrictions on movement for many of the large numbers of civilians seeking to leave the city. I urge all parties to ensure that civilians seeking to leave Afrin be given safe passage. Since 6 March, it has been reported that people in Afrin city have suffered from severe water shortages as its source of water has been damaged by the fighting.

Allow me to add a point of particular importance that was revealed in a recent report. The safety of Syrian women in particular is threatened when they are evacuated following the lifting of a siege or end of a battle. Threats include widespread sexual and gender-based violence, which has been widely documented and mentioned by women's groups. The protection and needs of women must be at the forefront of our response.

With regard to a separate humanitarian issue, on 14 March my technical team participated in the first meeting of the Working Group on detainees and missing persons that took place in Astana. We pressed the Astana guarantors at that meeting and before to make progress on the crucial issue, which to us, is one of the main reasons we attend meetings in Astana. It is an issue that has been at the forefront of our concerns. We have offered to host a standing secretariat so that information on detainees can be distributed in all meetings of the Working Group. Thus far, the guarantors have simply agreed to consider our proposal about a standing secretariat in Geneva to monitor the issue of detainees, but no final decision has been taken. We will intensify our contact with them and the parties in order to accelerate work on that important — frankly, crucial — humanitarian issue. We should remind ourselves that the issue of detainees and missing persons was first raised in Astana a year ago and, sadly, no concrete progress has been made so far. We owe it to the Syrian families on all sides who have long been awaiting word on the fate of their relatives.

Although the logic of war clearly still prevails and resolution 2401 (2018) is not being implemented as it should be, as the Secretary-General stated, we absolutely refuse to give up hope of seeing Syria rising from the ashes. The Syrian people deserve to be helped. The Syrian people are proud. They love their country. We need to help them to go back to having a normal country. There too, it is with the people of Syria in mind and their legitimate aspirations for the long-term shape of their country that we continue our political efforts — in spite of what we see on the ground — for a sustainable settlement of the conflict. And there too, the voices of women across Syria conveying their wish to play a meaningful role — just as with our own civil society — in the next stage of the political process must be heard.

Therefore, my team and I have continued to consult, in the context of the political side, widely and intensively on the formation of the constitutional committee in Geneva in an effort to advance the full and complete implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) within the framework of the United Nations-facilitated political process in Geneva. To this end, we seek to leverage the momentum produced by the Sochi final declaration, which emphasizes the fact that we should have a constitutional committee in Geneva with the assistance of the United Nations. We take note, therefore, of the statement issued — today, I believe — by the Astana guarantors in their own ministerial meeting, in which they reaffirmed that

> "the results of the Sochi Congress, especially to form the constitutional committee and to facilitate the

beginning of its work in Geneva with the assistance of the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Syria as soon as possible."

However, I have to be frank. I must report that at this stage — more than two weeks beyond one month since the National Dialogue Congress in Sochi — we have not yet received the complete inputs on the pool of candidates for a constitutional committee developed in Sochi, from the three guarantors. It is my intention, in close consultations with all concerned, to look carefully at this pool when we receive it, and at others as required and consistent with resolution 2254 (2015), to facilitate the establishment of the constitutional committee. I must also report, once again, that there is still some serious homework to be done regarding the Syrian Government's readiness to engage on implementing the Sochi final declaration and moving forward with a constitutional committee in Geneva. I have impressed that on the relevant guarantors repeatedly in recent weeks, just as I continue to make clear the readiness of the United Nations to engage the Government of Syria on this matter. We need them to be part of it. We need to have the comprehensive participation of all Syrian parties.

In the meantime, we have been proactive in offering creative suggestions as to how to expedite the formation of that constitutional committee. We continue to assess various options on how to advance discussions on all four baskets of the political process in Geneva. In particular, it is clear that there must be more and serious talks with the Government, the opposition and all Syrian and international stakeholders on what is required in order to establish a secure, calm, neutral environment, as per resolution 2254 (2015), in which a constitutional process and United Nations-supervised presidential and parliamentary elections, pursuant to a new constitution, could viably take place. We remained determined to engage all parties.

As I said in my most recent briefing, a month ago (see S/PV.8181), conflict is increasingly spilling over Syria's borders, or at least risks doing so. This month we have further incidents of potential and real international confrontation within Syria that we cannot independently verify, but which concern us. That is precisely we need urgent action on the political front. Syrians need to see some positive movement on the political process.

On Monday I will be attending a meeting of European Union (EU) Foreign Ministers here in Brussels. On Tuesday, I should be back in Geneva. I will attend the meeting at the invitation of High Representative Mogherini, in the context of the preparatory efforts of the EU and the United Nations for their joint ministerial conference in Brussels at the end of April. I hope that the Conference will provide a significant opportunity to bolster international support for the Syrian people though humanitarian commitments. I also hope that the gathering of a significant number of Foreign Ministers will also provide an opportunity to reinvigorate the collective efforts of the international community towards a sustainable peace through the United Nations-led peace process in Geneva, within the framework of resolution 2254 (2015) and other relevant resolutions.

In conclusion, I urge caution. We must recognize that we are witnessing developments of the utmost gravity on the ground. These events demand action, and the world is worried and watching. I remain concerned that concrete matters that we have been trying to advance — resolution 2401 (2018), detainees and a constitutional committee — need to move faster and with more meaningful impact than has so far proven possible. And de-escalation must replace what we are watching at the moment — a clear tendency towards escalation. I will continue, creatively and determinedly, to seek to facilitate the overall political process. As the Secretary-General said on Monday, the ultimate goal is to help the Syrians and to

> "see a united, democratic Syria able to avoid fragmentation and sectarianism and with its sovereignty and territorial integrity respected, and to see a Syrian people able to freely decide their future and choose their political leadership." (*S/PV.8201, p. 5*)

The President: I thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing.

I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Tenya (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank you, Sir, for convening this meeting and Mr. De Mistura for his briefing. We are grateful for his tireless and important efforts.

We agree that the continuation of the conflict and the regrettable humanitarian situation in Syria undermines the prospects of making political

progress. The unpunished lack of compliance with international law, international humanitarian law and Security Council resolutions erode the needed trust for sustainable peacebuilding. While we express our deep sympathy and solidarity with the victims, we would like at the same time to indicate our concern over the impact of the Syrian conflict on regional stability, the Council's credibility and the functioning of an rules-based international system.

More specifically, the international community is awaiting an immediate ceasefire throughout Syria, full access to the needed humanitarian assistance, the attainment of a political agreement that could bring about sustainable peace in Syria, and accountability for the heinous crimes committed, including the use of chemical weapons. There can be no more excuses and no more delays. The humanitarian ceasefire, as stipulated in resolution 2401 (2018), must be implemented immediately in eastern Ghouta, Idlib, Afrin, Raqqa, Rukban and throughout Syria.

All parties should commit to resolving the conflict peacefully, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). That will require the constructive participation of the Syrian Government and the opposition groups in establishing a constitutional committee, as agreed in Sochi. We believe that a new constitution must be drafted to lay the political and institutional groundwork for sustainable peace in Syria.

The Syrian Government and all parties to the conflict must rise to the occasion in confronting the gravity of the situation, prevent its further deterioration and escalation, and fulfil their obligations and responsibilities. The Astana guarantors must also meet expectations in terms of the special responsibility entailed by their influence and involvement on the ground. Yesterday's meeting in Astana and the meeting to be held in Istanbul in early April must yield concrete outcomes, including in the matter of those detained and missing.

As a member of the Council, Peru believes that its own responsibility vis-à-vis the tragic humanitarian situation in Syria entails requiring all parties involved in the conflict, especially those with greater ability to influence events on the ground, to comply with international law and international humanitarian law. Peru places priority on the protection of civilians, in particular women and children, and stresses the importance of maintaining the unity of the Council concerning this and all other conflicts and humanitarian crises, wherever they might arise.

In conclusion, we convey our support for Mr. De Mistura's work to encourage dialogue among the Syrian opposition groups that have expressed their willingness to comply with the ceasefire and expel terrorists from eastern Ghouta and other parties to the Syrian conflict.

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): We appreciate the initiative of convening this meeting owing to the gravity of the situation on the ground. We also thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. De Mistura, for his informative briefing.

As we continue to seek a solution to the tragic humanitarian situation throughout the country, it is also important to continue pursuing political efforts. We all believe that there is no military solution to the Syrian issue. The international community must continue to support and encourage the intra-Syrian negotiations and impress upon all parties that it is only by sitting around the negotiating table and engaging in frank, direct and inclusive dialogue that a solution can be reached that addresses everyone's concerns. In such a process, we must ensure that the sovereignty and unity of Syria are respected.

We support the United Nations in its mission as a mediator in finding a political solution to the Syrian issue, pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015). It is imperative to relaunch negotiations in Geneva and all other peace initiatives, including those in Astana and Sochi, which must lead to the resumption of negotiations in Geneva. The final outcome must ensure the well-being of the Syrian people. Consolidating a political process in Syria will be difficult without eradicating terrorism. The international community must also demonstrate its unfaltering unity by joining forces and following the same criteria to combat the various terrorist organizations operating in Syria.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We thank Special Envoy De Mistura for his update.

The humanitarian situation in Syria remains dire. We echo the United Nations call on all parties to facilitate a ceasefire and unconditional, unimpeded and sustained access to all people in need throughout the country, pursuant to resolution 2401 (2018). It is also vital to take the measures necessary to protect civilians

and civilian infrastructure, including schools and medical facilities, as required under international law and human rights standards.

As members of the Security Council are aware, the guarantor States of the agreement on the cessation of hostilities adopted a joint statement on the settlement of the conflict and its future direction at the meeting of Foreign Ministers on 16 March in Astana. Kazakhstan remains committed to bringing peace to Syria. The situation is not simple, but nevertheless we cannot give up. Kazakhstan has taken the following positions.

First, we do not believe in a military solution, for that would only aggravate an already difficult situation. We need serious compromises from every side. Any conflict — even the most serious — ends with negotiations, and we must strive to achieve the goal of bringing peace to Syria. We know of many fine examples in which conflicting parties in many other countries have come together despite difficult negotiations so as to find common prosperity for their peoples.

Secondly, Kazakhstan calls on the Syrian Government and opposition parties to immediately begin substantive talks on the entire spectrum of issues. Astana does not anticipate any political or international miracles, yet sees great promise in a collective and pragmatic approach. Kazakhstan, for its part, is deeply committed to ending the intense suffering, which has lasted for eight long years.

We all know that today Syria is undergoing a significant challenge that must not lead to a deadlock, but offer new opportunities to pave the way to a peaceful and lasting political settlement to the crisis. We hope that the forthcoming ninth round of talks, to be held in Astana in May, will offer an opportunity to end the war. In that regard, we will urge the guarantors and Syrian parties to overcome their differences through dialogue and reach a final agreement covering every aspect of the issue.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte D'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Côte d'Ivoire thanks Mr. De Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for his briefing on the latest developments in the political process and the situation in the country, and for his work to find a solution to the ongoing crisis.

The Ivorian delegation remains concerned about the upsurge in fighting, which with every passing day further distances us from finding a peaceful settlement through political negotiations. Despite the efforts of the international community to establish a ceasefire, we continue to witness indiscriminate attacks and bombardments in eastern Ghouta and other areas in Syria, thereby resulting in a large number of casualties among civilians and the destruction of important infrastructure.

My country therefore calls once again for an immediate cessation of hostilities and urges the international community to work together towards the effective implementation of resolution 2401 (2018). That resolution, which was unanimously adopted by the Security Council, calls for establishing a humanitarian cessation of hostilities of at least 30 days so as to allow for the safe, lasting and unhindered access of humanitarian convoys to deliver essential supplies to the people of eastern Ghouta and other areas in Syria. Should it be implemented, such a temporary cessation of hostilities could not only alleviate the suffering of millions of people living in distress and hopelessness, but also allow for the resumption of political talks among Syrian parties in a peaceful environment. In that regard, Côte d'Ivoire hopes that the Astana meeting will lead to a lasting ceasefire, improve the humanitarian situation and establish the conditions for advancing the political process.

My country welcomes all initiatives aimed at reviving the inter-Syrian dialogue and encourages Mr. De Mistura to continue undertaking, within the framework of the Geneva process, the steps needed to set up the committee responsible for drafting Syria's new constitution, as agreed at the meeting in Sochi in the Russian Federation.

In conclusion, my delegation urges the Syrian parties to give priority to dialogue, which is the only way to advance the political process with a view to a definitive end to the crisis, in accordance with the road map laid out by resolution 2254 (2015). That is Côte d'Ivoire's profound conviction and it is in the interests of the Syrian people.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational States of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We appreciate the briefing given by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, to whom we reiterate our support in the discharge of his duties.

As on previous occasions, my delegation wishes to express its support for the various meetings held in

different contexts and at different levels, which have allowed for the creation of de-escalation zones, the cessation of hostilities and humanitarian access. At the same time, we remain converned over the urgent need to advance in a political process that will help to resolve the conflict in Syria so that the people can return to peace.

That is why we again highlight the commitments made at the Syrian National Dialogue Congress, held in Sochi on 30 January. It focused on strengthening the political process led by the United Nations within the framework of resolution 2254 (2015), particularly through the drafting of a new constitution by a constitutional committee, which we believe should be representative and neutral. We underscore in particular that the mandate, terms of reference, powers, rules of procedure and selection criteria for the composition of the committee must be agreed in the United Nations-supported talks held in Geneva.

In that regard, we firmly believe that the principles agreed at the Sochi Congress will lead to a strong commitment on the part of the parties to respecting the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, in the context of its right to choose its own political, economic and social systems, without pressure or foreign interference. We are certain that the political process will resume as a result of those dialogues.

However, and despite the advances in the political arena, we remain concerned over the critical situation of the Syrian people. In that regard, we welcome the holding of the Astana meeting and its outcome, and we hope that those political agreements will be reflected on the ground. We also express our greatest hopes for the success of the summit to be held shortly among high-level representatives of Turkey, Iran and Russia. We hope that it will serve to reaffirm the Astana agreements and de-escalation zones with a view to reducing violence and addressing the needs of families of detained, kidnapped and disappeared persons.

Once again, the Council has the challenge of remaining united and calling on the parties involved to join forces and maintain the impetus of the Astana talks and the political process in Sochi, among others, the outcomes of which, we reiterate, must strengthen the political process in Geneva. We hope that those forums for dialogue will promote points of convergence and consensus in order to reduce violence and allow the humanitarian access that is so necessary, not only for the safe and dignified return of refugees and internally displaced persons, but also to achieve sustainable peace in Syria. To that end, it is crucial for the parties to demonstrate their willingness to seek a settlement to the conflict, which has persisted for more than 8 years.

We again call on all parties involved to effectively implement resolution 2401 (2018) throughout the entire Syrian territory in order to achieve unrestricted humanitarian access and permit the necessary urgent medical evacuations. We reject any attempt at fragmentation or sectarianism in Syria, and believe that the Syrian people must be able to freely decide their future and political leadership within the framework of their sovereignty and territorial integrity. In that regard, we reiterate that the only way to resolve the conflict is through an inclusive, negotiated and concerted political process, led by the Syrian people for the Syrian people, which will enable a peaceful solution for all parties involved.

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

I wish to again remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable to Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syria) (*spoke in Arabic*): On 12 March (see S/PV.8201), I informed the members of the Security Council of a number of measures undertaken by the Syrian Government to alleviate the suffering of Syrians throughout my country caused by armed terrorist groups. Today, I assure those present once again that the Government of Syria is indeed most keen to save the lives of its citizens and continues to take all necessary measures to ensure their safety and security.

In line with those efforts, the Government of Syria opened the new secure corridor in Hamouriyah village, which was liberated from terrorists yesterday in eastern Ghouta. Its aim is to assist the evacuation of civilians who are being used as human shields by terrorist groups. Just yesterday, Thursday, 15 March, more than 40,000 civilians exited eastern Ghouta through the new additional corridor. They went to the Syrian Government, which coordinated with the Syrian Red Crescent, to facilitate their safe transportation to temporary shelters that are equipped with all the necessary resources. They were not transferred to camps, or tents. The Syrian Army, in coordination with

the Russian Reconciliation Centre for Syria, has opened a total of three corridors in Hamouriyah, Jisreen and Wafideen. Yesterday, the Government of Syria also allowed the entry of a joint assistance convoy of the Red Crescent, the Red Cross and the United Nations, made up of 25 trucks carrying 340 tons of various medical and nutritional supplies. The Syrian Government will continue to allow the passage of such convoys, security conditions permitting.

In return for all those efforts undertaken by the Government of Syria to protect its citizens, the armed terrorist groups — upon direct instructions from the Governments of the States supporting them — continue to use civilians as human shields in eastern Ghouta and prevent them from using the corridors as they target them with bullets and missiles. It is quite strange that the Government of Syria is shouldering the huge responsibility of implementing resolution 2401 (2018) and responding to the needs of civilians exiting the inferno of terror in the eastern Ghouta, while the United Nations agencies working in Damascus, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and Governments of other countries that are lamenting the destiny of our civilian population have done nothing materially or morally to alleviate the suffering of tens of thousands of people who have escaped from terrorism. One hundred thousand civilians were displaced in Afrin and around 100,000 fled eastern Ghouta —— a total of almost 200,000 civilians — yet no one has provided them with help.

Some States members of the Security Council are abusing the work of the Council in launching campaigns to defame and spread misinformation about the Government of Syria, especially with respect to the unofficial Arria Formula meeting that the Council held on 12 March. However, I recall that the United Nations is an Organization of Governments and not a theatre for the display of power, and that giving the opportunity to terrorist groups, including the so called White Helmets affiliated with the Al-Nusra Front, to use the platform of the Security Council represents a gross violation of Security Council resolutions, especially those on combating terrorism.

The biggest scandal is that one of the United Nations agencies working in Damascus has asked for the transfer of 76 White Helmets out of eastern Ghouta. It does not care about the tens of thousands of civilians but it cares about 76 White Helmet terrorists. If the Security Council really wants to know about what is happening in Syria, it should ask some of our people who are still living in the city of Raqqa to talk before the Council about the scandals perpetrated against civilians by the outlaw coalition, and its extreme respect for international law after it completely destroyed their city. The coalition has committed the most terrible massacres against civilians, provided protection to 4,000 terrorists affiliated with Da'esh, and facilitated their exit from the city of Raqqa in order to use them somewhere else in Syria. The city of Raqqa is to us what Dresden is to Germany.

The Security Council should also ask to hear from some of our people in Afrin, who could tell its members about the ideal implementation of the provisions of international humanitarian law and resolution 2401 (2018) by the invading Turkish forces that have perpetrated terrible massacres against civilians and displaced tens of thousands of them. The Council should also ask some foreign terrorist fighters who have returned to their countries to explain in an open meeting of the Security Council how the Governments of their countries were actually involved in their recruitment, training and financing and how they provided them with arms and sent them to Syria to commit massacres against the Syrian people. The problem is, however, that these fighters have been recycled, renamed and rebranded as the moderate opposition in Syria.

The Security Council should also ask some of our people who have left eastern Ghouta over the past few days to talk about the terrorist practices of Jaysh Al-Islam, Faylaq Al-Rahman and Ahrar Al-Sham, the three groups that have been called the moderate Syrian opposition by the United States, France, Britain and their agents in the Gulf Sheikhdoms, and to talk in particular about how those groups kill anyone who tries to get out. They have seized all forms of humanitarian and medical assistance and sold it at very high prices. The Council should also ask some of our people from Fo'ah and Kafraya to talk about their years of suffering in the ongoing oppressive siege there, which has been conducted by Al-Nusra Front with direct assistance from Turkey and Qatar. However, it seems that those defenders of humanity have no ears and tongues to listen about the suffering of those civilians and talk about it.

If Western countries in the Security Council were one part in a thousand as sincere as the Russian Federation in their assertions that they really care about the Syrian people and respect the provisions

of the international law, the purposes and principles of the Charter and the Security Council resolutions, particularly those pertaining to combating terrorism, then terrorism would not have emerged in Syria and in other countries. No civilian would have suffered in eastern Ghouta or in eastern Aleppo or in the old city of Homs, Raqqa or any other Syrian city. Those Western countries have invested in terrorism to bring down Iraq, Libya and Yemen. Now, they have also invested in terrorism in Syria and that investment has failed. It is as if these countries were saying that, given a choice between supporting the demons of terrorism, on one the hand, and the Syrian State, on the other, they, the sponsors of terrorism, would choose the demons.

In conclusion, the Government of my country reiterates its principled position that the solution to the Syrian crisis is a political one, based on an intra-Syrian dialogue led by Syria without any foreign interference or preconditions. I have spent hours and hours in negotiations with Mr. De Mistura on those very words in resolution 2254 (2015). I remind Council members that the success of the political track and the tangible enhancement of the humanitarian situation will depend primarily on creating an environment conducive to international and regional commitment to seriously fighting terrorism in Syria and freeing the process from politicization.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.